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NELSON'S  
HISTORY OF THE WAR  

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VOLUME XIX.



NELSON'S HISTORY  
OF THE WAR. By  
John Buchan.

Volume XIX. The Spring Campaigns of 1917.

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# NELSON'S HISTORY OF THE WAR.

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## CHAPTER CXXXIII.

### THE GERMAN RETREAT IN THE WEST.

The German Plan—The Siegfried Line—The British Task during the Winter—The Enemy Lines on the Ancre—The Clearing of the Beaumont Hamel Spur—Capture of Grandcourt—The Germans evacuate Pys, Miraumont, and Serre—The Le Transloy-Loupart Line—Capture of Puisieux-au-Mont and Gommecourt—Capture of Irles—Beginning of German Retreat—Enemy driven from Bapaume Ridge—Allies enter Bapaume, Chaules, and Roye—Fall of Peronne and Nesle—Enemy Devastation and Barbarism—Its Effect on Allied Troops—British cross the Somme—Advance towards Siegfried Line—British near St. Quentin—French on the Oise and Ailette—The Forest of St. Gobain—Success of German Retirement—The German Pivots.

**D**URING the last weeks of the Battle of the Somme our airmen, scouting far east of Bapaume and Peronne, reported a great activity in front of Cambrai and St. Quentin. Thousands of Russian prisoners were at work digging trenches on a plan which seemed to imply the creation of a fresh fortified line. Shortly after, rumours began to spread in Germany of a new bulwark of the Fatherland created by the genius of von Hindenburg. The successive defeats on the Somme, and

the rapid loss of positions which had been pronounced impregnable, had induced in the German people a profound nervousness about the situation in the West. At any moment it seemed that the defences might crumble, and the German frontiers lie open to the Allied armies. The magic of von Hindenburg's name was invoked to reassure his people. He had had no part in the original defences of the West, and took no discredit by their failure. But if a position were created under his auspices, that position would stand, for in German eyes failure and von Hindenburg had never met. The new line was known as the Siegfried Line, and the legend of it was whispered through Germany during the winter. Our Intelligence Corps, which followed with interest every stage in its construction, called it the Hindenburg Line, being well aware that its main value for Germany lay in its association with Germany's most popular commander.

The situation in the West demanded a plan, for the Somme had shaken the German *moral* to its foundations. It was clear that a mere defensive battle was not enough ; for to be driven from crest to crest by the Allied infantry, and pounded day and night by the Allied guns, would lead presently to a general disaster. Von Hindenburg resolved to prepare for an offensive in the spring, and for this purpose he accumulated, by methods which we have already described, a strategic reserve which presently mounted to upwards of fifty divisions. He was aware that the Allies would advance as soon as the soil dried up after the winter, and he proposed to yield ground which was no longer tenable, and fall back upon a position of his own choosing, where

he might compel them to fight at a disadvantage. His argument was not without reason. The Allies in advancing would be moving over a country devastated by war, and every yard of their progress would be slow and difficult. The German retreat would be by good roads and railways in a terrain with which they were minutely familiar, and to a halting-place which had been laboriously prepared. The odds were that in such a situation an opportunity would be found to strike a counter-blow with the chances in Germany's favour. A frontal offensive like the Battle of the Somme was not possible for von Hindenburg, with his inferiority in guns and—even after all his recruiting efforts—in numbers of men. His one hope was some such ruse where advantage could be taken of a long-prepared position and the difficulties of an enemy advancing across an old battlefield. But if he were to succeed, the retreat must be meticulously planned and methodically executed. No area must be ceded to force instead of strategy; for, if the withdrawal at any point were hustled, the whole programme would fall to pieces, and a counterstroke would become impossible.

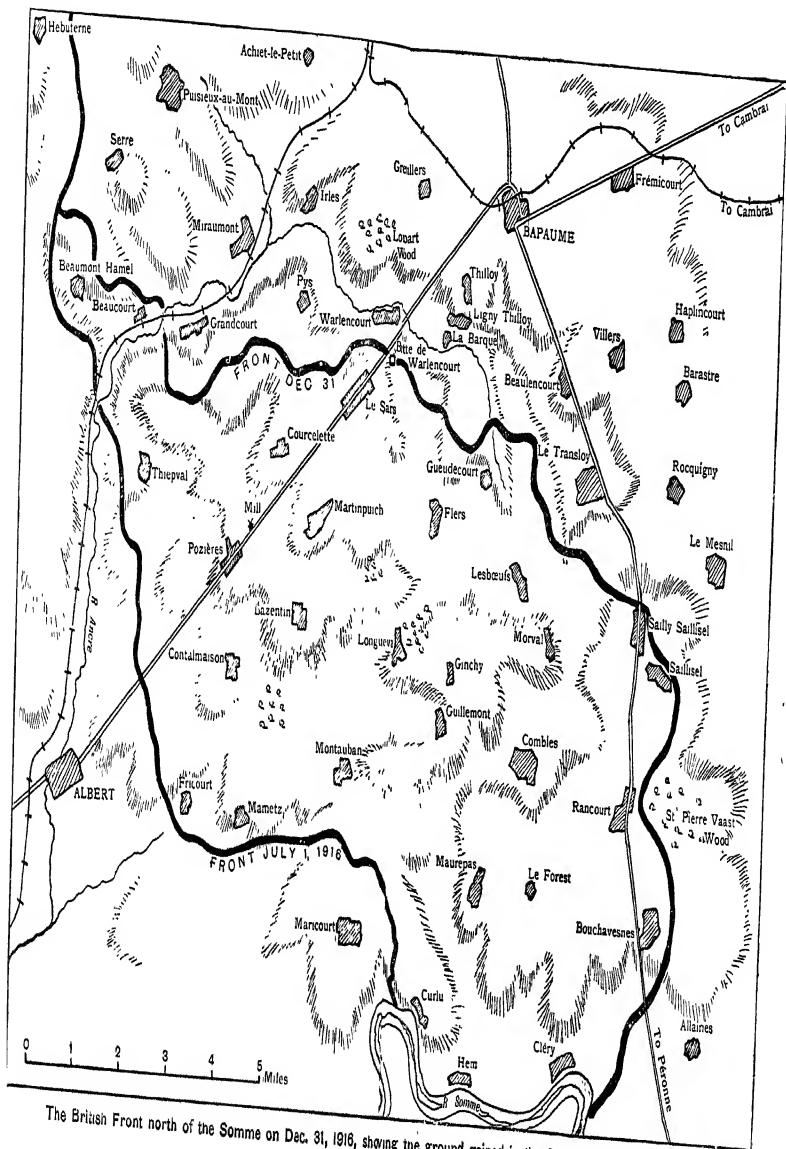
When, in the third week of November 1916, the larger operations on the Ancre came to an end and the great Battle of the Somme died away, the condition of the German line was not enviable. From the Butte de Warlencourt to the river Somme they had fairly good positions, though in most parts at the mercy of our observation from the higher ground. But to the north the salient which had its apex on the spur above Beaumont Hamel was exposed to constant danger from the British movement in the Ancre valley, where every fresh advance

led to a more awkward enfilading, and laid bare to our view the rear of the defences behind Serre and Gommecourt. To increase this awkwardness was obviously the British winter task. It could be done with small expenditure of men in the short spells of fine weather. But in the meantime preparation must be made for the great spring offensive. At a conference of Allied commanders held in November a great combined attack had been fixed for the spring of 1917. The task assigned to the British armies was a combined assault on the German salient between the Scarpe and the Ancre, by the Third Army from the north and the Fifth Army from the south. When this had been achieved it was Sir Douglas Haig's intention to develop the main operations of the summer in Flanders.

For these projects extensive preparations must be made. The troops which had been so sorely tried in the past five months must be rested and brought up to strength ; new divisions must be trained, and the vast educational system continued under which the whole British hinterland had become a Staff College. Above all, the communications must be perfected for the coming advance. We have seen how in October the incessant rain had played havoc with the roads in the Somme area. A hard winter would complete their ruin unless the whole system of routes were re-formed. Light railways must be constructed on a colossal scale, to ease the strain on the main highways and set the weather at defiance. "The task of obtaining the amount of railway material to meet the demands of our armies," wrote Sir Douglas Haig in his dispatch, "and of carrying out the work of construction at the rate











rendered necessary by our plans, in addition to providing labour and materials for the necessary repair of roads, was one of the very greatest difficulty." It was, indeed, the key of the whole situation. The railway companies in Britain and Canada loyally co-operated, giving up locomotives and rolling stock, and even tearing up tracks to provide the necessary rails. The work was under Major-General Sir Eric Geddes, the Director-General of Transportation, who in this task first showed the exceptional organizing ability and energy which presently made him one of the conspicuous figures of the war.

The attack of November 18, 1916, the last phase of the Battle of the Ancre, had brought our line on the left bank of the Ancre Nov. 18,  
close to the outskirts of Pys and Grand- 1916.  
court. The German position in this area now ran from the spur above Beaumont Hamel along the ridge north of Beaucourt, and then crossed the Ancre and enclosed Grandcourt, Miraumont, and Pys. Behind lay a strong second system, a double line of trenches heavily wired, in front of Bucquoy and Achiet-le-Petit, Grevillers, and Loupart Wood to the Albert-Bapaume road, whence it continued south-east past Le Transloy to Saillisel. This position, which we called the Le Transloy-Loupart line, was, both from its natural and artificial defences, immensely strong, scarcely inferior to the Thiepval-Morval line which we had carried in the autumn. Behind it, on the far side of the crest, a third line was being constructed during November and December covering Rocquigny, Bapaume, and Ablainzevelle.

December was wet and misty, and with the opening of the new year came a period of bitter

frost, varied by snowstorms, which tried sorely the endurance of the men in the front trenches. But in January, in spite of the weather, we began our steady advance. Our first business was to clear

the Beaumont Hamel spur. At dawn on *Jan. 11*, 11th January we carried the crest for 1917. nearly a mile east and north-east of Beaumont Hamel, taking over two hundred prisoners; and, after repeated small attacks, by the end of the month we had won all the spur, had pushed 1,000 yards north of Beaucourt, and had gained a footing on the southern slopes of the ridge north-west of Miraumont. Our casualties were light, for the ground had been magnificently prepared by our artillery, with the assistance of direct observation from the Thiepval ridge.

Our new position gave us command of the whole western side of the high ground from Serre to opposite Grandcourt. Our next objective was the top

of this ridge. On the night of 3rd *Feb. 3-4*. February and the following day we bit into the enemy's second line on a broad front, and carried our line north of the Ancre to a point level with the centre of Grandcourt village. This advance made Grandcourt untenable by the enemy, and on the

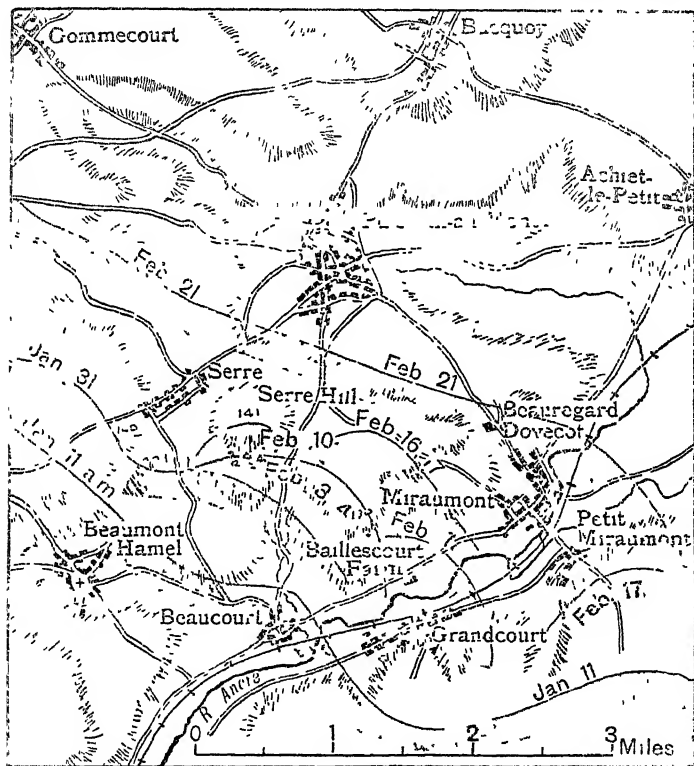
morning of 6th February he evacuated *Feb. 6*. the trenches between Grandcourt and Stuff Redoubt. Next morning we entered the vil-

lage, and that night, pushing forward on *Feb. 7*. the right bank of the stream, took Baillecourt Farm, within 1,000 yards of Miraumont.

Serre had now become an acute salient, and since we held most of the hollow which runs north from Beaucourt, it was only a question of days till

## GERMAN RETREAT IN THE WEST. 15

it yielded. On the night of 10th February, after a sharp struggle, we carried a line of trenches at the southern foot of Serre Hill. *Feb. 10.* In the two succeeding days we beat off counter-



Operations on the left (region of the Upper Ancre),  
January and February 1917.

attacks, and prepared for a more elaborate movement. At Courcellette a clearly marked spur runs westward from the Thiepval-Morval ridge. The

northern end of this commanded the approaches to Pys and Miraumont from the south, and moreover gave observation over the nest of enemy batteries concealed in the Upper Ancre glen, on whose support the defence of Serre depended. South of the Ancre this spur was our objective, while north of the stream we aimed at winning a sunken road on the ridge north-east of Baillescourt Farm, which would give us command of the western approaches to Miraumont.

A thaw set in on 16th February, and the night following was black as pitch, with a thin mist rising from the sweating earth. The enemy expected

*Feb. 17.* some movement, and about 4.45 a.m. on the morning of the 17th he opened a heavy barrage, which caught our troops as they were forming for the attack. In spite of these drawbacks, our men advanced at 5.45 a.m. with perfect resolution. North of the stream we won all our objectives, and south of it, though we fell short of our full goal, we reached a line within a few hundred yards of Petit Miraumont, the suburb of Miraumont across the Ancre. Six hundred pris-

*Feb. 18.* oners were the result of the day. Next day, the 18th, the enemy counter-attacked without success, and during the subsequent days we crept to the summit of the desired ridge. The whole hinterland of Serre and the whole of the Upper Ancre glen were now exposed to our direct observation, and it was clear that the German position in that area could not be maintained. Miraumont was the key of Serre; Serre was the key of Puisieux-au-Mont and Gommecourt. When the corner stone is taken from the building the other supports must totter and fall.

## GERMAN RETREAT IN THE WEST. 17

We were not mistaken in our forecast. On 21st February our patrols reported that the trenches before Pys, Miraumont, and Serre seemed to be empty. That day and the next *Feb. 21-* we pushed continuously forward, and *22.* discovered that the enemy had evacuated all his positions in front of the Le Transloy-Loupart line and north of the Albert-Bapaume road. By the evening of the 25th we held the hamlets of Warlencourt-Eaucourt, Pys, Mirau- *Feb. 25.* mont, the famous dovecot at Beauregard, and the ruins of Serre. The last gain brought satisfaction to the many thousands who on 1st July, and again in November in the preceding year, had struggled in vain against its honeycombed ridges and its forest of wire. Our advance had few casualties and little opposition. The enemy guns shelled their old trenches, and here and there a nest of machine guns had to be cleared out. The withdrawal had been skilfully managed, but it had all the chances on its side. In Sir Douglas Haig's words :—

“The enemy's retirement at this juncture was greatly favoured by the weather. The prolonged period of exceptional frost, following on a wet autumn, had frozen the ground to a great depth. When the thaw commenced, in the third week of February, the roads, disintegrated by the frost, broke up, the sides of the trenches fell in, and the area through which our troops had fought their way forward returned to a condition of slough and quagmire even worse than that of the previous autumn. On the other hand, the condition of the roads and the surface of the ground behind the enemy steadily improved the farther he withdrew from the scene

of the fighting. He was also materially assisted by a succession of misty days, which greatly interfered with the work of our aeroplanes. Over such ground and in such conditions rapid pursuit was impossible. It is greatly to the credit of all ranks concerned that, in spite of all difficulties, constant touch was maintained with the enemy, and that timely information was obtained of his movements."

The position now was that north of the Albert-Bapaume road we were face to face with the main Le Transloy-Loupard line, but that south of the road we had still to carry an intermediate position, running from a point in the Le Transloy line west of the village of Beaulencourt in front of Ligny-Thilloy and Le Barque to the south end of Loupart Wood. During the last week of February we gradually ate our way into this position, and by the evening of 2nd March had won Le Barque,

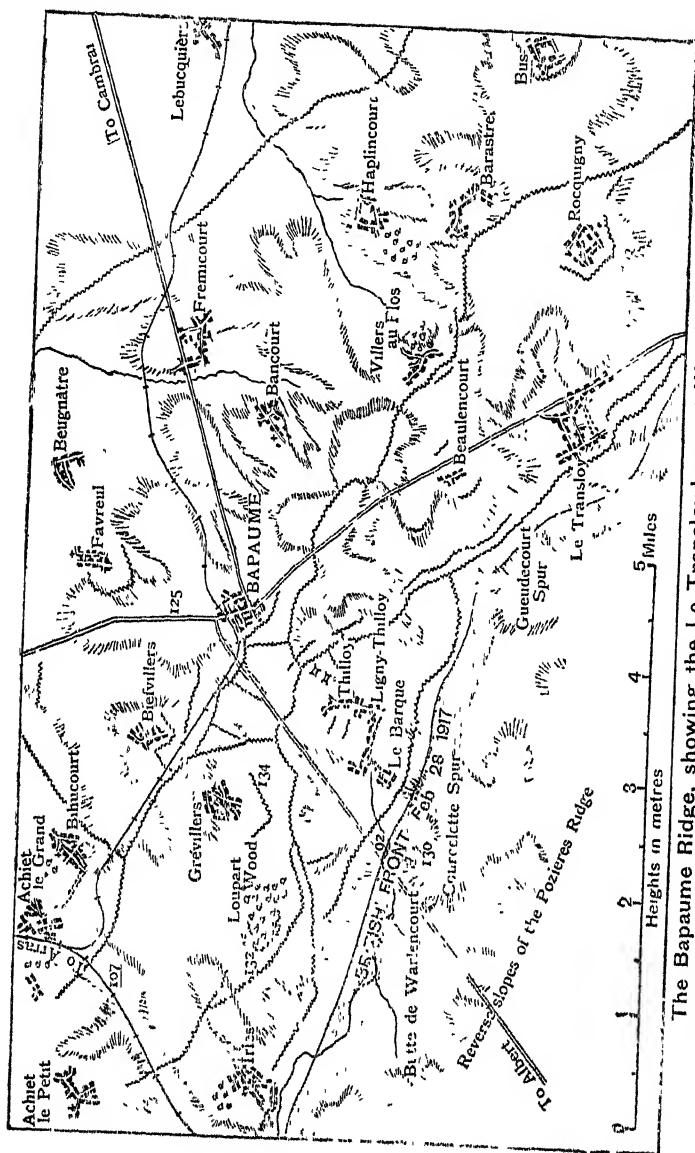
*Mar. 2.* Ligny-Thilloy, and Thilloy, and were within 2,000 yards of Bapaume itself. North of the Ancre by that date we had entered Puisieux-le-Mont, and held Gommecourt village, with its park and chateau. Only Irles remained, now the point of a sharp salient linked up to Loupart Wood and Achiet-le-Petit by strong trench lines. It took us a week to make routes through the wilderness, and during our road-making we had to keep in constant touch with the enemy by raids and small outpost attacks. On 10th March we were ready,

*Mar. 10.* and at 5.25 that morning we captured Irles, taking numerous machine guns and trench mortars, and considerably more prisoners than our total number of casualties.

By now there were signs that the time had

ripened for the greater withdrawal which von Hindenburg had long contemplated. At the request of the French Staff we had taken over a larger part of the front, and by 26th Feb. 26. February we extended our right as far south as Roye, so that the British line in the West was now 110 miles long. This gave us an extended and most intricate front to watch, and the two armies in the centre area—the Fifth, under Sir Herbert Gough, north of the Albert-Bapaume road; and the Fourth, under Sir Henry Rawlinson, to the south of it—had a task which tried to the utmost their capacities. The Germans were in an awkward salient between Arras and Le Transloy, and they were in a position scarcely less difficult in the greater salient between Arras and the Aisne. To cut off the former meant a withdrawal to the line on the eastern side of the Bapaume ridge running from Rocquigny, 300 yards east of Le Transloy, through Bapaume to Ablainzevelle, 3,000 yards north-east of Bucquoy. It meant the surrender of the Le Transloy-Loupart line, and the retirement to the last of the prepared positions of which we were cognisant in the Somme area. To cut off the larger salient involved a far greater retirement—a retirement to the Siegfried Line itself, which branched off from the old position near Arras, ran south-eastward for twelve miles to Quéant, and then passed west of Cambrai and St. Quentin and La Fère to the heights of the Aisne. By the beginning of the second week of March the Allies were conscious of a general movement in the enemy lines everywhere between the Aisne and Arras. For the Germans to carry out their programme it was necessary first to extricate themselves from the local Ba-





The Bapaume Ridge, showing the Le Transloy-Loupard Wood Line and the British Front at the end of February 1917.

paume salient. There they held one of the strongest positions on the whole western front, and it was intended to yield it by slow degrees while preparations for withdrawal were completed in other areas.

But the British advance was speedier than the enemy foresaw. Especially, in spite of the tortured ground, the guns had been brought forward with surprising celerity, and roads prepared for the ammunition supply. On 11th March our artillery opened against the Le Transloy-*Mar. 11.*

Loupart line, and in two days the enemy had been shelled out of it, and driven back upon his last position. This was not according to his programme. Grevillers and Loupart Wood were now ours, and we lost no time in pressing the bombardment of the final line. The event dislocated the German plan, and hustled a retreat which had been meant to be far more orderly and leisured. On 14th March our patrols found the German *Mar. 14.*

first line empty at St. Pierre Vaast Wood. Cautiously pushing forward, we held the whole of that wood and the western half of Moislains Wood by the evening of 16th March. Meantime *Mar. 16.*

we had discovered that the enemy front south of the Somme was becoming fluid. It had grown very thin, and seemed to be held mainly by rearguards with machine guns. The time had come for a general pressure along the whole front. Hitherto the fighting had been almost exclusively in the British area. The advance was now to spread from the Scheldt to the Aisne.

On the morning of 17th March the Allied commanders, French and British, ordered a general forward movement on a front of *Mar. 17.*

forty-five miles. The movement was, indeed, greater, for it embraced virtually the whole line from Arras to north of Soissons—seventy miles as the crow flies, well over one hundred if the sinuosities of the front trenches were followed. There was no serious resistance. Rearguards had been left in places like Chaulnes, Government Farm between the woods of St. Pierre Vaast and Vaux, Bapaume, and Achiet-le-Grand; but they were no more than rearguards, and were easily pushed back, leaving a track of flaming villages. That night the Australians of the British Fifth Army were in Bapaume, and advanced troops of the Fourth Army were in Chaulnes. The French Sixth Army entered Roye, where they found some hundred civilians whom the enemy had had no time to remove, and south-east of the town reached the Roye-Lassigny road.

*Mar. 18.* Next day, the 18th, British and French cavalry met in the streets of Nesle. Rawlinson entered Peronne at seven that morning, and south of that town forced his way up to the bank of the Somme. By ten in the evening our engineers had partly repaired the bridge at Brie, and our vanguards were over the river.

The next few days revealed to our soldiers some of the most surprising sights of the campaign. With the crossing of the Beugny-Ytres line on 18th March we were beyond the old tortured battlefield, with its infinite ramification of trenches. Henceforward, up to the new Siegfried Line there was open country. The fields were not pitted with shell-holes; the trees were not splintered into matchwood; the villages had not been levelled by the Allied artillery. But the enemy himself in falling back had made a great de-

struction. Some of his doings were no doubt justifiable on military grounds. He was within his rights in destroying roads, in mining certain areas, in leveling buildings which might give billets to the Allies, in cutting down woods which could afford cover. Such is the ugly business of war; such it has been from the beginning of time. But war among civilized folk has always had its decencies, and no rag of them remained to cover the nakedness of German barbarism. Around the villages were often little orchards of immature fruit-trees which could not have offered shelter to a rat. Every one of these had been methodically killed.\* Every house in town and hamlet had been looted of all goods that could be removed, and what could not be taken away had been smashed up or defiled. Churches had been ruthlessly violated. Graves had been broken open and plundered. Sacred symbols had been defaced. Wells had been poisoned.

And in these deeds Germany gloried. Shameless details were published in her press as examples of how masterly and orderly had been the retreat, and how thorough-going were German methods. On a wall in one ruined town some apologist had written, "Do not rage at these things; only wonder." The oncoming Allies wondered, and they did not rage; their loathing was too deep a

\* "When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged of thee? Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down" (Deut. xx. 19, 20).

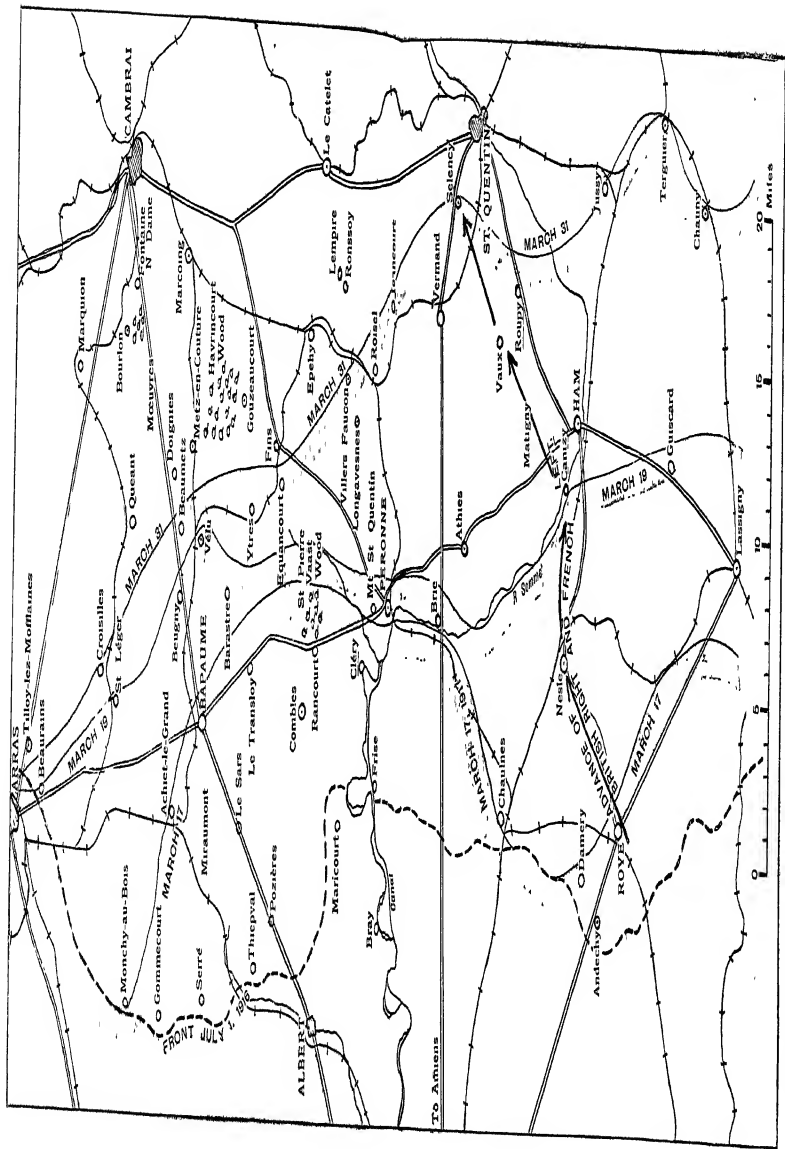
thing for the honest passion of anger. When the French cavalry cantered into some village and saw the thin faces of their fellow-citizens, lit now with a new hope but bearing terrible marks of ravage and suffering, they said nothing. No more did the British soldier, when he found a peasant groping blindly among the wanton ruins of his cottage for some of his pitiful little treasures, now in some German haversack. The thing was beyond words. They recognized by his mark the beast which, like new knight-errants, they were pledged to destroy; and the knowledge, long possessed but now a thousandfold increased, was shown only in their eagerness to get to grips again. Their wrath found vent in superhuman labour to restore the roads so that the guns could come forward, for the guns were the only argument to deal with savagery. Like the sack of Belgium, the German retreat in the West emphasized that in the Allied purpose which was penal and retributive. On the last day of

*Mar. 31.* March M. Viviani in the French Senate spoke the mind of his countrymen. "These acts of murder and rapine and pillage are not merely an outrage on international law and honour. They constitute crimes dealt with in the penal code of all civilized countries. In order to prepare the verdict of history these crimes must be placed on record adequately and accurately. We shall fight until victory be gained, for it is on it alone that chastisement depends." And his hearers sent out this message to the world :—

"The Senate denounces to the civilized world the criminal acts committed by the Germans in the regions of France occupied by them—crimes against private property and







The British Advance after the great retreat of the Germans, showing the fronts reached on March 17 and 18, and at the end of the month.





public buildings, honour, liberty, life ; crimes perpetrated without the slightest excuse of military necessity and in systematic contempt for the International Convention of October 1907, ratified by representatives of the German Empire. It holds up to universal execration the authors of these misdeeds, for which justice demands punishment ; it salutes reverently the victims, to whom the nation gives a solemn pledge and promise that they shall obtain full reparation from the enemy ; it affirms, even more solemnly than before, the determination of France, supported by her splendid soldiers and hand in hand with her Allies, to pursue the struggle forced upon her to the final crushing of German imperialism and militarism, which have to answer for all the misery, ruin, and mourning heaped upon the world."

During those days the Allies had literally to grope their way forward. In the words of Sir Douglas Haig's dispatch : " We were advancing, over country in which all means of communication had been destroyed, against an enemy whose armies were still intact and capable of launching a vigorous offensive, should a favourable opening present itself. Strong detachments of his infantry and cavalry occupied points of advantage along our line of advance, serving to keep the enemy informed of our progress, and to screen his own movements. His guns, which had already been withdrawn to prepared positions, were available at any moment to cover and support a sudden counterstroke, while the conditions of the country across which we were moving made the progress of our own artillery unavoidably slow. The bulk of the enemy's forces were known to be holding a very formidable defensive system, upon which he could fall back should his counterstroke miss its aim. On the other hand, our troops as they moved forward left all prepared defences farther and farther behind them." The position craved

wary walking, and those were anxious days for the Allied High Commands. Their cavalry felt their way gingerly through a country full of unknown perils. The infantry behind them prepared, as they advanced, successive lines of resistance in the event of a counterstroke. Behind them, again, the engineers and labour battalions did wonderful work in restoring roads and bridges and pushing on light railways, so that presently the difficulties of the old battlefield were conquered. The retreat of the Germans was, all things considered, a brilliant performance; but not less brilliant was the work of the Allies which nipped in the bud the counterstroke that had been the main object of that retreat.

To continue the chronicle of events. On the evening of 19th March the British held the line of the Somme from Canizy to Peronne, *Mar. 19.* with outposts across the river, while

northward their front ran from Beaurains, just south of Arras, by St. Leger and Velu to Barastre. The French were moving towards Ham, and had entered Noyon, in the Oise valley. Between the Oise and the Aisne they had occupied the old German front line, and had taken Crouy, on the plateau north of

Soissons. On the 20th the British were *Mar. 20.* fairly across the Somme by the new bridge at Brie, which had to be carried across both the river and the canal,\* while the French

\* The magnitude of this performance may be judged from the official account :—

“ Six gaps had to be bridged across the canal and river, some of them of considerable width and over a swift-flowing stream. The work was commenced on the morning of the 18th March, and was carried out night and day in three stages. By 10 p.m. on the same day footbridges for infantry had

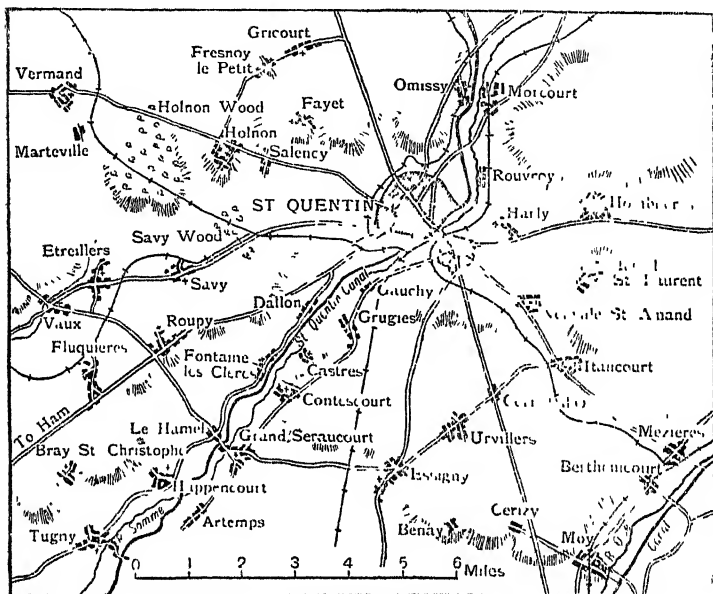
## GERMAN RETREAT IN THE WEST. 27

were in Guiscard and east of Ham. The British advance was now reaching its limits in the north, for we were within a mile or two of the Siegfried Line, which entered the old German front-line system at Tilloy-lez-Mofflains. On the 21st we took Beaumetz, and had to resist five attempts to recover it, for the enemy's resistance was hardening as he drew near his prepared position. The French on that day had pushed as far as Roupy, only five miles from St. Quentin; had reached Tergnier, and crossed the St. Quentin Canal; and, south of Chauny, were on the line of the Ailette. But though each day saw some gain, the progress was slower, and the enemy had to be forced out of each outpost. Those days saw some brilliant cavalry work. On 27th March a single British squadron drove the enemy from Villers Faucon and its neighbouring villages, taking twenty-three prisoners and four machine guns. So at Equancourt and Longarvesnes, where the Germans did not await the charge of a handful of our horsemen. *Mar. 21.* *Mar. 27.*

At the beginning of April the British were close up against the Siegfried Line from Beaurains to Doignies, and lay south by Epéhy and Jeancourt to near Selency, a few miles north-west of St. Quentin,

been completed. Medium type bridges for horse transport and cavalry were completed by 5 a.m. on the 20th March, and by 2 p.m. on the 21st March, or three and a half days after they had been begun, heavy bridges capable of taking all forms of traffic had taken the place of the lighter type. Medium type variation bridges were constructed as the heavy bridges were begun, so that, from the time the first bridges were thrown across the river, traffic was practically continuous."

at which point they again touched the German prepared position. The French were within a mile or two of La Fère, and east of the great Mons-Cambrai-St. Quentin-La Fère line, which was one



St. Quentin.

of the main feeders of the enemy front on the Aisne.

*April 1.* On 1st April the British, after a sharp fight, took the village of Savy, which gave them a prospect of St. Quentin, and next day

*April 2.* drove the Germans from Savy Wood. During the following days, in spite of frequent counter-attacks, we pushed north of the wood between the St. Quentin-Cambrai railway and the Crozat Canal, which links the Scheldt and the

Somme. We took half a dozen villages on the western skirts of St. Quentin, and established ourselves within two miles of the town. Farther north we carried the line of fortified villages, the outposts of the Siegfried Line, stretching from Doignies to Croisilles. There now only remained the advanced position between Doignies and Selency, *April 4-5*. and on the 4th and 5th of April, in bitter, snowy weather, we took the villages of Roussoy, Lempere, and Metz-en-Couture, and pushed into the outskirts of Havrincourt Wood. Meantime the French were moving towards the Oise north of La Fère, advancing on the outworks of the St. Gobain plateau, between the Oise and the Ailette, and south of the latter stream moving along the ridge north of the Aisne. On the 3rd, *April 3*. in the first area, they took the villages of Dallon, Giffécourt, and Cérizy, and in the last reached the edge of Laffaux and occupied Vauxaillon. On the 4th they entered Moy, on the west bank of the Oise where it flows due south to La Fère. *April 4*.

The position now was that between Arras and the Aisne the Allies were almost everywhere in front of the German Siegfried Line. By the capture of Moy, St. Quentin was slightly outflanked towards the south. The vital point was the St. Gobain plateau, the occupation of which would make La Fère untenable, and would be the first step towards the capture of Laon. But the enemy was well aware of the importance of this plateau, and its many ravines and dense woods made it a hard position to carry. Already the French had won Coucy, with its noble old castle now blown up by the Germans, and had

reached the western edge of the tableland. But there the enemy front hardened, as it hardened south of the Ailette, on the limestone scarp between that river and the Aisne. His plan was now apparent. He had reached his famous line, and believed it to be impregnable. He would fight desperately for all parts of it, but especially for the pivots on which its security depended. These pivots were the positions about Arras in the north, and those in the south around Laon in the Falaises de Champagne.

The German retirement was an event of supreme military interest, skilfully conducted and on the whole successful. The enemy did not yield much ground, for though some hundreds of ruined villages were restored to France, the depth gained was at the greatest only some twenty miles. He had few casualties, and lost few guns. But it is well to remember that, on his own declaration, he did not succeed in his main purpose. He sought to retire at his own time; but he had to submit to the Allied will, for the fighting on the Ancre in February and early March drove him from the Bapaume ridge, whether he willed it or not. He was more hustled in his retirement than he intended, and he wholly failed to draw the Allies into the snare which he had devised for them. He had never the chance for the crushing counterstroke which he had planned. Moreover, as he told his people, he aimed at restoring the old war of movement; but in a fortnight he was as tightly pinned to his entrenchments as he had been on the hills of the Somme. The marvellous new Siegfried Line was not a fortress from which he could sally, but a prison.

We may say, therefore, that the honours of the retreat were evenly divided, and certainly the Allies emerged with no discredit. In Sir Douglas Haig's words: "In spite of a season of unusual severity, the winter campaign has been conducted to a successful issue under most trying and arduous conditions. Activity on our battle front has been maintained almost without a break from the conclusion of last year's offensive to the commencement of the present operations. . . . The courage and endurance of our troops has carried them triumphantly through a period of fighting of a particularly trying nature, in which they have been subjected to the maximum of physical hardship and physical strain. . . . After more than two years of trench warfare considerable bodies of our troops have been engaged under conditions approximating to open fighting, and cavalry has been given an opportunity to perform its special duties. Our operations south of Arras during the latter half of March are, therefore, of peculiar interest, and the results achieved by all arms have been most satisfactory. Although the deliberate nature of the enemy's withdrawal enabled him to choose his own ground for resistance, and to employ every device to inflict losses on our troops, our casualties, which had been exceedingly moderate throughout the operations on the Ancre, during the period of the retreat became exceptionally light. The prospect of a more general resumption of open fighting can be regarded with great confidence." It was clear that the slow ritual of a war of positions had not stiffened the joints of the Allies for the open field.

To follow in the wake of the advancing armies



was a strange experience for one who through the preceding eight months had watched the patient grinding movement of the Somme battle. The roads were speedily repaired, and the Albert-Bapaume highway, once a honeycomb of shell-pits, soon attained the perfection of a *route nationale* in peace. It was strange and eery to move swiftly through country where a month before a man could scarcely crawl, and to pass the ghostly tumulus of the Butte de Warlencourt, round which so much good blood had been shed. Beyond Bapaume one saw, almost with a shock, fields yet cultivated and trees unbroken. In the shallow pocket where St. Quentin lay the guns still grumbled ; but by the end of the first week of April the new Siegfried Line seemed quiet, save for an occasional burst of counter-battery work and the bickering of outposts. But in the south around St. Gobain Forest and on the Aisne plateau there was a steady bombardment, and, as one went north and came to the point near Arras where the new enemy positions branched off from the old, the ear was deafened with the heavy rumour of war.

The Allies were not to be balked of their spring offensive. The Siegfried Line had been reconnoitred, and the next blow would be struck at its pivots.

## CHAPTER CXXXIV.

### THE BATTLE OF ARRAS.

The Position at the Beginning of April—British Dispositions between the Oise and the Sea—Strength of the Enemy—The Drocourt-Quéant Switch—The Arras Neighbourhood—The Preparation for the Battle—The British Dispositions at Arras—The Attack on Easter Monday—The Canadians carry Vimy—The Scots carry the Railway Triangle—German Third Line broken—End of First Stage of Battle—Prisoners and Guns taken—Estimate of Results—Canadians close on Lens—Capture of Monchy—The Attack of 23rd April—The Fighting North of the Scarpe—Survey at End of April—The Attack on the Siegfried Line at Bullecourt—The May Struggle for Fresnoy, Rœux, and Bullecourt—Gallantry of Australian Corps—End of Battle—Results—New German Tactics—The “ Shock-troops.”

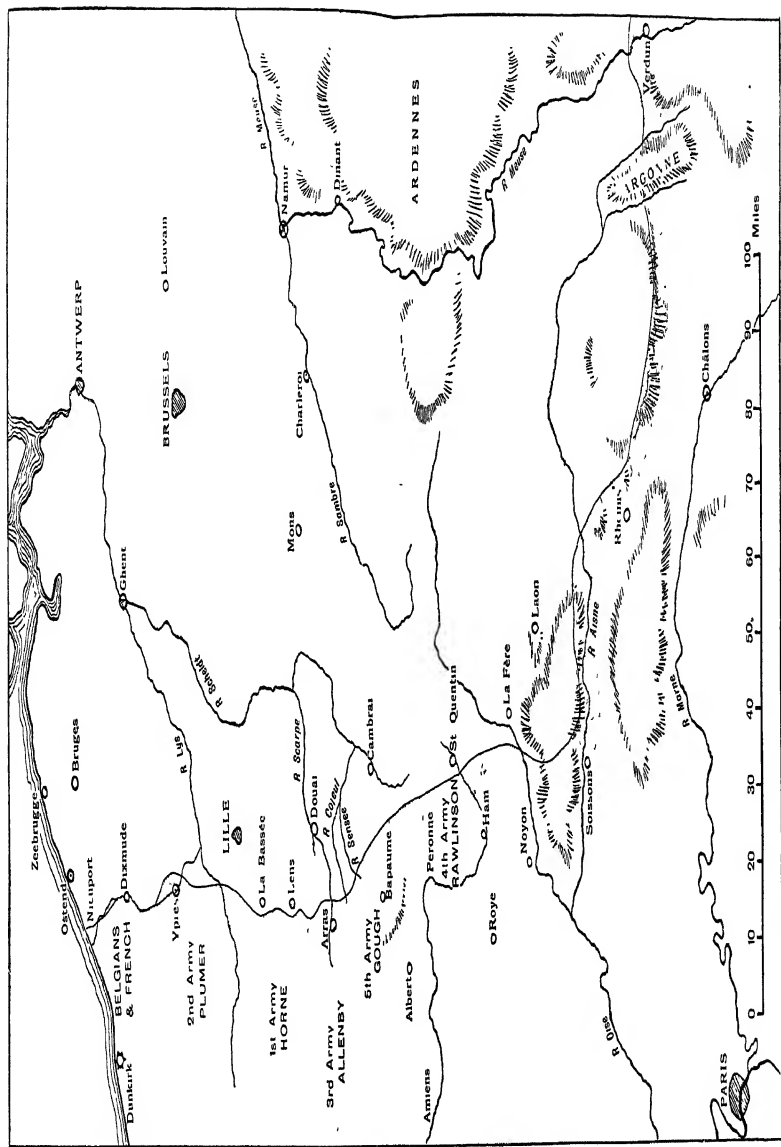
AT the end of the first week of April the German armies were back in the new Siegfried Line, secure in defence, if deprived of any roseate chance of an offensive. Everywhere from Arras to the Aisne the attack of the following enemy had been checked. The French were involved in the difficult country of the St. Gobain plateau ; Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army had halted at the outskirts of St. Quentin ; Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army, having forced the outlying positions early in April, stood in front of the main defences in the upper valleys of the Cojeul and the Sensée. In the Arras region lay Sir Edmund Allenby's Third Army,

and beyond it Sir Henry Horne's First Army before Lens and La Bassée, and thence to the sea Sir Herbert Plumer's Second Army—all three in the positions which they had held for more than a year. The army group under the Crown Prince of Bavaria had been strengthened in men and in material, for some sixty divisions lay between the coast and the Oise.\* To meet the Allied artillery the enemy had increased the range of his field guns by some two thousand yards; he had in use a large number of long-range naval guns, and in his 5.9-inch howitzer he had a heavy weapon of exceptional value. His air work had vastly improved, especially as regards fast single-seater fighting machines like the Albatross and the Halberstadter. He comforted himself with the reflection that his Siegfried Line gave him a position stronger than that which he had lost on the Somme; that the Allies, wearied with the hectic business of pursuit, were not in a position to launch any great attack yet awhile; and that ere they were ready his defences would have become impregnable.

The eyes of the Allied generals were fixed on the pivots, especially on that northern one where, at the hamlet of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines, the Siegfried Line branched off from the old front. Between that point and Lens the original lines were very strong, consisting of three main systems, each constructed on the familiar pattern of four parallel lines of trenches, studded with redoubts, and linked up with numerous switches. A special and very powerful

\* The group contained three armies—the Fourth, under von Armin, from the sea to the Lys; the Sixth, under Otto von Below, from the Lys to the Sensée; and the Second, under von der Marwitz, from the Sensée to south of the Oise.





The Western Front from the Sea to Verdun at the beginning of April 1917.





switch line ran for five and a half miles from the village of Feuchy northward across the Scarpe to beyond Thelus, and so constituted what was virtually a fourth line of defence. The whole defensive belt was from two to five miles deep ; but the German Command were not content with it. They had designed an independent line running from Drocourt, south-east of Lens, to the Siegfried Line at Quéant, which should be an alternative in case of an assault on the Arras salient. But at the beginning of April this position, which was to become famous as the Drocourt-Quéant line, was not yet completed. It was intended as a protection for Douai and Cambrai, the loss of which would have made the whole Siegfried system untenable. But it was designed only *pro majore cautela*, for there was every confidence in the mighty ramified defences between Lens and Tilloy, and in the resisting power of the northern Siegfried sector.

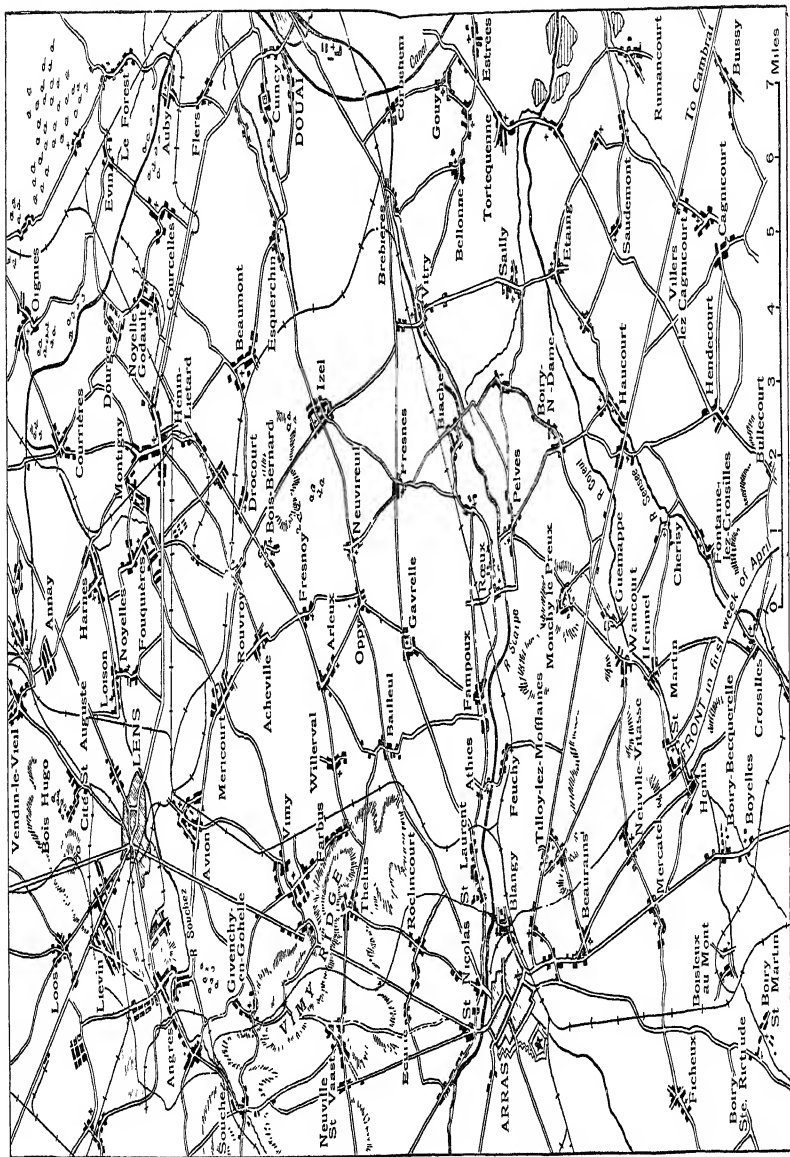
The Arras neighbourhood had seen some of the bloodiest fighting of the war. There, in October 1914, Maud'huy had held the fort through a desperate month, and had beaten back von Buelow's attempt to break the Allied front and hew a way to the Channel. There, in May and June 1915, D'Urbal and the French Tenth Army had battled in vain for the Vimy heights. There, in September of the same year, during the Battle of Loos, a portion of the heights was won ; but the true crest was never gained, and during the succeeding month we were forced back to the boggy valley of the Souchez. At the moment of which we write the British line from Loos southward lay just west of the Double Crassier, which had once been gained



by the 47th London Division: east of Souchez and Neuville St. Vaast: and thence in a sharp curve eastward to cover Roclincourt. The key of all this area was the Vimy Ridge, which dominated the British lines on the Souchez, as the Messines Ridge dominated the southern part of the Ypres salient. Our front crossed the Scarpe just west of Blangy, and south of the Arras-Cambrai road came in contact with the Siegfried Line from Tilloy-lez-Moflaines onward. Beaurains was now ours, and Arras was, therefore, free from its old encirclement on the south. Here, where the Picardy wolds break down into the flats of the Scheldt, long low spurs reach out to the eastward, separating the valleys of the Scarpe, the Cojeul, and the Sensée. Their sides are scored with smaller valleys, and on their crests are various hillocks—such as Telegraph Hill, south of Tilloy, and the more considerable height above Monchy-le-Preux. It is a pockety country—the last foothills of the uplands of Northern France, and, like all foothills, a strong position for any defence.

The city of Arras, situated as it was less than a mile inside the British lines, might well have shared the fate of Ypres. It was, like Ypres, the neck of the bottle, and through it and its environs went all the transport for the front between the Scarpe and the Cojeul. But strangely enough, it had for two years been a place of comparative peace. It had been badly shelled, but mainly in the autumn and winter of 1914. The cathedral, a poor rococo edifice in the Palladian manner, had been wholly destroyed, and looked far nobler in its ruin than it had ever done in its integrity. The beautiful old Hôtel de Ville had been wrecked, and much damage had





**General Map of the Lens-Arras Front and the country towards Douai.**





been done among the exquisite Spanish houses of the Grande Place. Few buildings had altogether escaped, but the place was a desert and not a fragment. It was still a habitable though a desolated city. Entering it by the Baudimont Gate on a summer's day, the stranger saw the long white street running intact towards the railway station, and it was not till he looked closer that he noted shell-marks and broken windows and the other signs of war. There were many hundreds of civilians still living there, and occasionally children could be seen playing on the pavement. Visitors came often, for it was the easiest place in all France from which to enter the first lines. Across the railway a short walk in communication trenches, or even on the open road, and you were in the actual battle-front west of Blangy or in the faubourg of St. Sauveur. One inn at least was still open, and men could dine in comfort, and then proceed to their posts in the line. But up till April 1917 the place had the air of a tomb. It was like a city stricken by the plague, whole yet tenantless. Especially eery did it seem in the winter twilight, when in the long echoing streets the only sign of life was an occasional British soldier or a hurrying peasant woman, and the rumble of the guns beyond Vimy alone broke the depressed silence. The gaunt ruins of the cathedral rose like a splendid headstone in a graveyard.

At the beginning of April Arras awoke to an amazing change. Its streets and lanes once more became full of life, and the Roman arch of the Baudimont Gate saw an endless procession of troops and transport. A city makes a difficult base for a great attack. It must be the route of advancing

infantry and their billeting area, and it is a mark which the enemy guns can scarcely miss. To minimize this danger, the Allied generals had recourse to a bold plan. They resolved to assemble in this section their armies underground. After the fashion of old French towns, Arras had huge ancient sewers, like those of Paris which may be read of in *Les Misérables*. A map of them was found, and the underground labyrinth was explored and enlarged. Moreover, the town had grown over the quarries from which the older part had been built, and these also were discovered. The result was that a second city was created below the first, where three divisions could have been assembled in perfect security. The caverns were lit by electricity, and plans and signposts were put up as if it had been a Tube railway station. As a matter of fact, the thing was not needed. The Germans shelled the town intermittently, but there was no real bombardment, and before Arras could be methodically assailed the enemy had been pushed many miles eastward.

The British front of attack was slightly over twelve miles long, from Givenchy-en-Gohelle in the north to a point just short of Croisilles in the south. Against the Vimy Ridge lay Sir Julian Byng's Canadian Corps, with one British brigade; between the Canadians and the Scarpe lay Sir Charles Fergusson's 17th Corps; opposite Arras lay General Aylmer Haldane's 6th Corps; and south of it, astride the Cojeul, the 7th Corps, under General Snow. In its constituents the army of assault was largely Scottish. Thirty-eight Scots battalions were destined to go over the parapets—a larger

number than the British at Waterloo, and more than seven times the size of the force that Bruce commanded at Bannockburn.

In the third week of March a systematic cutting of the enemy's wire began, and our heavy artillery shelled his back areas and communications. About Wednesday, 4th April, the British guns woke along the whole sector. There *April 4.* was a steady bombardment of all the enemy positions, more especially the great fortress of the Vimy Ridge. Wonderful counter-battery work was done, and battery after battery of the enemy was put out of action, located partly by direct observation from the air, and partly by our new device for sound-identification. These were days of clear, cold spring weather, with the wind in the north-east, and from dawn to dark our airplanes fought a mighty battle on their own account. In the history of air-fighting that week may rank as an epoch, for it was the last desperate struggle on the enemy's part to defend his side of the line against our encroaching supremacy. It was a week of heavy losses, for at all costs the foe must be blinded, and the British airmen kept up one continuous offensive. Forty-eight of our own planes failed to return, and forty-six of the enemy's were destroyed or driven down out of control. The attackers, as was natural, paid the heavier price.

The "preparation" was intense till Sunday, 8th April. That day was ideal weather, with a foretaste of spring. A lull seemed to fall *April 8.* upon the British front, and the ear-splitting din of the past week died away into sporadic bombardments. It is possible that this sudden



quiet outwitted the enemy. He was perfectly aware of the coming attack, and he knew its area and objective. He had expected it each day, and each day had been disappointed. On the Sunday he began to reply, and rained shells at intervals into the streets of Arras. But he did little harm. The troops of attack there were waiting comfortably in cellars and underground assembly stations. In the late evening the weather changed. The wind shifted to the west, and blew up to rain and squalls of snow. During the night there were long spells of quiet, broken by feverish outbursts of enemy fire from Vimy to Croisilles. Our own batteries were for the most part silent.

Zero hour was 5.30 on the morning of Easter Monday. At 4 a.m. a drizzle had begun which

*April 9.* changed presently to drifts of thin snow. It was intensely cold, and it was scarcely half-light, so that the troops waiting for the signal saw before them only a dark mist flecked with snowflakes. But at the appointed moment the British guns broke into such a fire as had been yet seen on no battle-ground on earth. It was the first hour of the Somme repeated, but a hundredfold more awful. As our men went over the parapets they felt as if they were under the protection of some supernatural power, for the heaven above them was one canopy of shrieking steel. There were now no enemy front trenches; soon there were no second-line trenches; only a hummocky waste of craters and broken wire. Within forty minutes all the enemy's first position was captured, and our men were moving steadily against the second, while our barrage crept relentlessly before them.

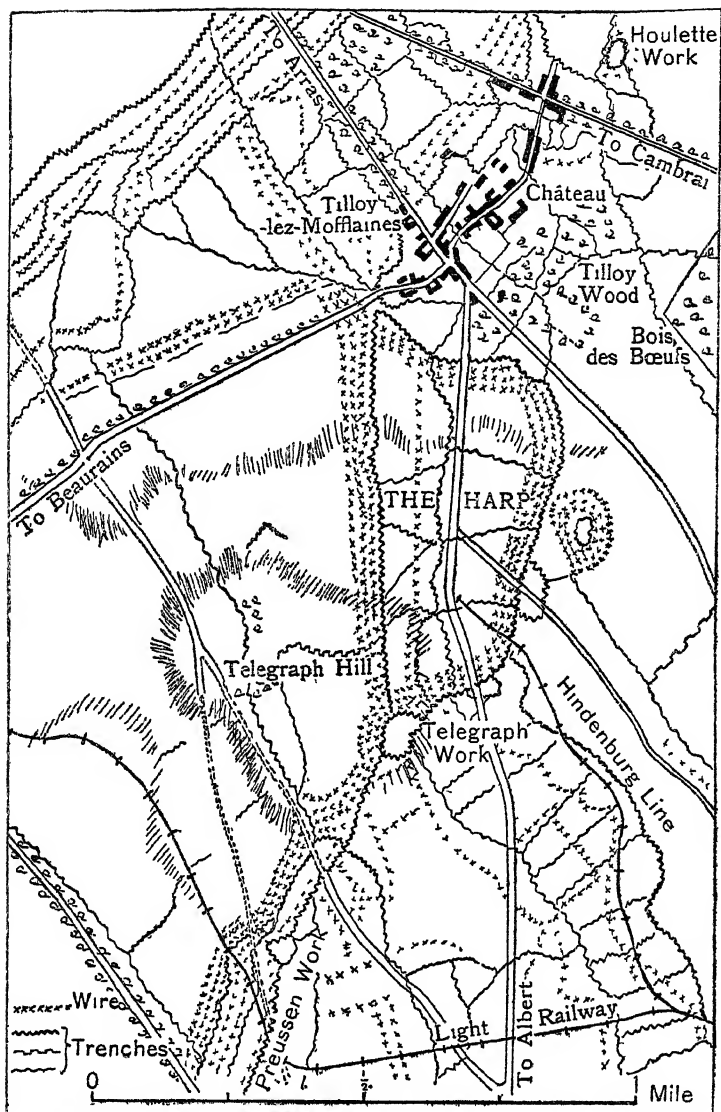
On the left wing the Canadians with a bound reached the crest of Vimy, and swarmed on to the tableland from which the ground fell away to the flat industrial area between Lens and Douai. Few finer pieces of dogged resolution were seen in the campaign. The guns had done the work for them till they were beyond the crest, but after that, over a mile of plateau, they had to fight their way from shell-hole to shell-hole under a deluge of rifle and machine-gun fire. Before nine o'clock all the Vimy Ridge was ours, except its northern corner and the high point marked Hill 145. Between the Canadians and the Scarpe the 17th Corps had taken La Folie Farm, and were advancing on Thelus. In front of Arras the 6th Corps had overrun Blangy, and were facing the formidable Railway Triangle, while farther south Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines had fallen, and, south of it, the great fortress called the Harp. The Harp was such a place as in the early days of the Somme would have baffled us for a month or more. It was stronger than Contalmaison or Pozières or Guillemont. It was rushed by a batch of Tanks, some of which stuck fast in its entanglements, while others forced their way through to the plain beyond. In a very short time there was no Harp, and its garrison were on their way westward to the cages.

By 9.30 the whole of the German second position had fallen, except a short length west of Bailleul. By the early afternoon the enemy had been chased from the two worst points south of the Scarpe—Observation Ridge and the Railway Triangle. This last, formed by the junction of the Lens and Douai lines, was a formidable obstacle, bristling with machine guns, and for a little it stayed the advance

of the Scottish division on the left of the 6th Corps—the division which had captured Loos and Martinpuich, and had long ranked as one of the *corps d'élite* of the British Army. But our artillery came to their aid, and presently they were surging eastward; and in a hollow called Battery Valley, between the German second and third positions, they made enormous captures of enemy guns. By the evening that division had taken the German third line at Feuchy, and to the north of the Scarpe the right division of the 17th Corps—Scottish and South African troops—had carried Athies, and an English division, following after them, had taken Fampoux village and Hyderabad Redoubt and broken into the German third line on a front of two and a half miles. The Feuchy switch line had now gone, and the enemy front had been utterly destroyed. He had no prepared position short of the Drocourt-Quéant line, and that was still in the making.

But the weather was on his side. The ground was sodden, and our guns took time to bring up. He was holding it with machine guns in pockets, which prevented the use of cavalry for what is the true duty of cavalry. Had we possessed a light type of Tank in reasonable numbers the rout could have been made complete. As it was, there was no chance of a dramatic *coup de grâce*. The infantry could only push forward slowly and methodically, and complete their capture of the German third position. In wild weather on Tuesday,

*April 10.* 10th April, the Canadians carried Hill 145, and with it gained the whole of Vimy Ridge. The relics of the 14th Bavarians, which had formed the defence, were withdrawn and sent to recruit on



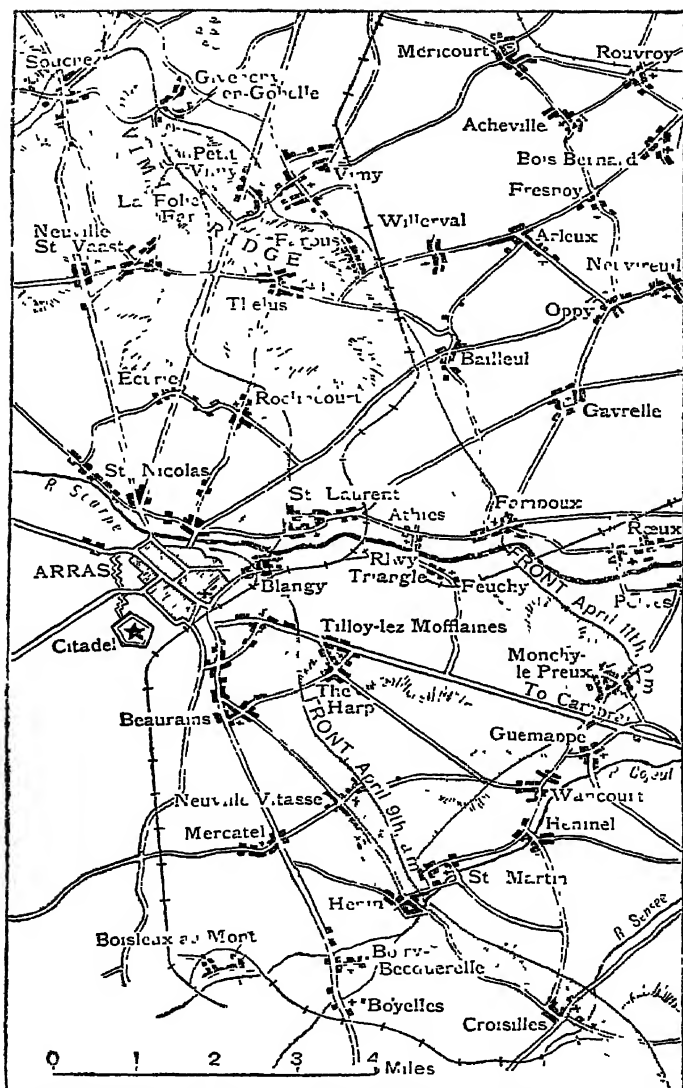
Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines and "The Harp."

the Eastern front. To the south the village and wood of Farbus were taken, and that evening, after hard fighting, the 6th Corps reached the hill where stood the village of Monchy-le-Preux. Next day,

*April 11.* the 11th, in a snowstorm, Monchy was carried, with the assistance of detachments of cavalry,\* but not without heavy losses. It was a key position of the country between the Scarpe and the Sensée, standing on the ridge of a little plateau some ninety feet above the surrounding levels. Its approaches on four sides were sunken roads lined with machine guns. In the end it fell to a converging attack from the north and west, but its defence showed that the enemy was recovering from his first demoralization. Moreover, he had begun to counter-attack.

We may take the evening of Wednesday, 11th April, as the end of the first stage of the Battle of Arras. It was now necessary for the infantry attack to wait on the advance of the guns, and meantime to devote itself to minor operations to round off its gains. It had been a remarkable success, won at comparatively small cost, by a meticulous preparation in which no detail had been neglected. Air-

\* The cavalry had been brought east of Arras on the afternoon of the 9th, in case the break in the German third line should be sufficiently wide to permit the use of mounted troops. They were held up, however, by the unbroken wire south of Feuchy and by Monchy-le-Preux hill. Small bodies were employed during the afternoon to maintain touch with the troops on the two sides of the Scarpe. On the 10th an attempt to pass them south and north of Monchy was defeated by the enemy machine-gun fire. They took part next day in the capture of Monchy, when Brigadier-General Bulkeley-Johnson fell. On the 12th they were withdrawn west of Arras.



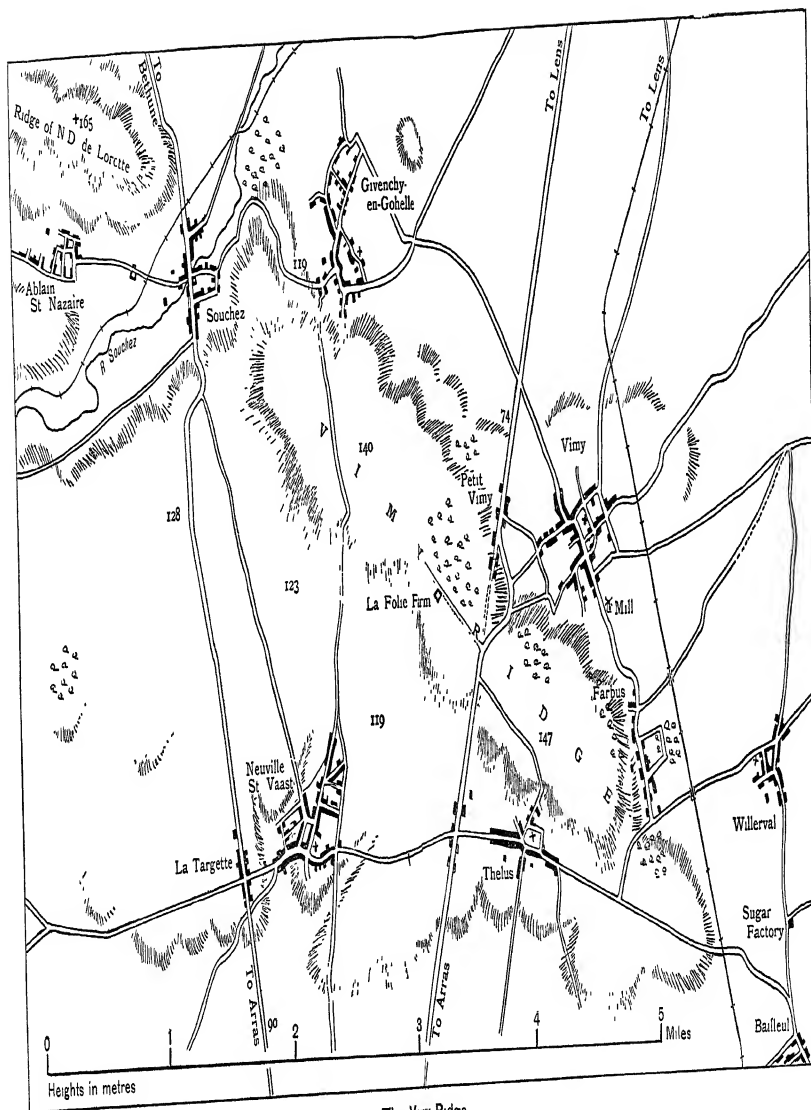
The Battle of Arras, showing ground gained in the first stage, 9th to 11th April.

craft, artillery, infantry, and Tanks had worked in perfect combination. The result had been that on a front of twelve miles we had broken through all the German defences, and come half-way to the Drocourt-Quéant line. We had carried two miles of the northern end of the Siegfried Line. The exploits of each corps in action had been magnificent. The Canadians at Vimy had stormed the last of the great German view-points south of the Lys. By their speed they had cut off large numbers of the enemy in honeycombs of the hill, such as the Prinz Arnuld and Voelker tunnels, and had taken over 4,000 prisoners. The 17th Corps had won desperate fortresses like the Hyderabad Redoubt, where a general and all his staff were captured, and had between three and four thousand prisoners, one brigade taking nearly as many as it had effectives in action. The 6th Corps had dealt with the Harp and the Railway Triangle, and by their captures in Battery Valley were responsible for the larger number of guns taken. Altogether in the three days something over 12,000 prisoners and 150 guns were captured, and the guns were speedily turned into British weapons. General Byng formed a "1st, 2nd, and 3rd Pan-Germanic group" out of the batteries which fell to his share. These were the largest captures so far made by the British Army in the same period of time.

But no victory can truly be measured by booty, and the essence of the achievement lay in the breach made in the German wall. It was an undeniable breach, the thing we had hoped for at Loos and on two occasions during the Somme. But it was a breach of which full use could not be made. Modern







The Vimy Ridge.





war is so intricate that against an enemy with a proper equipment it must be slow. The lightning dash is forbidden, since the speed of an advance is the speed of its slowest unit—the guns and their munitionment. Cavalry could not be used as in old days, since a machine-gun outpost could frustrate any cavalry action, and the true weapon, the Tank, had not yet been perfected. The first days of the Battle of Arras confirmed in their views those who had always held that on the Western front there could be no short cut to success. The Germans, it is true, had been able to drive back Russians and Rumanians in a war of movement, but in both cases they fought against troops who had an imperfect military machine to support them. Against an enemy approximately our equal we could hope for no spectacular triumph yet awhile. The Somme tactics still held the field—the limited objective, progress by slow and calculated stages, a steady, grinding attrition. Some day these methods would wear thin the stoutest metal, and then the end would come. Sir Douglas Haig had never subscribed to the heresy, common at this time in certain civilian and military circles, that by some superior cleverness the fruits of victory might be reaped without the enemy being beaten. The first and only task was to beat the enemy, and against an enemy so well equipped, so stubborn, and, on the whole, so well led, success could not be won by any bold, sensational strategy. Each time we struck we won a victory, though not *the* victory, but each time brought us nearer to the desired goal. The Somme had taught us the right tactics, the only tactics. They were slow and laborious and patient, but they were sure.

On 12th April we improved our position on each flank of the new battlefield. On the south we

*April 12.* took, with the assistance of the Tanks, the two villages of Wancourt and Héninel, which faced each other from opposite banks of the Cojeul, and with them added to our gains another 1,000 yards of the Siegfried Line. It was a day of snowstorms, and on our left, north of the Vimy Ridge, the Canadians took the two small hills, known as the Pimple and the Bois-en-Hache, on either side of the Souchez stream, behind which the enemy might have concentrated troops for a counter-attack. This last success drove the Germans back upon their third line from Gavrelle northward, and compelled them to bethink themselves of the defences of Lens. The wind had veered to the south and brought squalls of rain, through which on the two following

*April 13-14.* days we pressed hard on their retreat. A wide tract of country from Fampoux to just south of Lens became ours, including the villages of Vimy, Bailleul, Willerval, Givenchy-en-Gohelle, Angres, and the town of Lieven. There fell, too, the Double Crassier, south of Loos, which had once been ours. Looking from the ridge, our men saw clusters of red-brick dwellings, broken by slag-heaps, tall chimneys, and the headgear of mines, and now obscured by the smoke from burning buildings and the débris of explosions. In all the mining suburbs of Lens—the *cités* named after divers saints—the enemy strove to make a great destruction, but he was driven out before he could complete his work. We captured vast quantities of stores and ammunition, truckloads of tools, pioneer dumps,

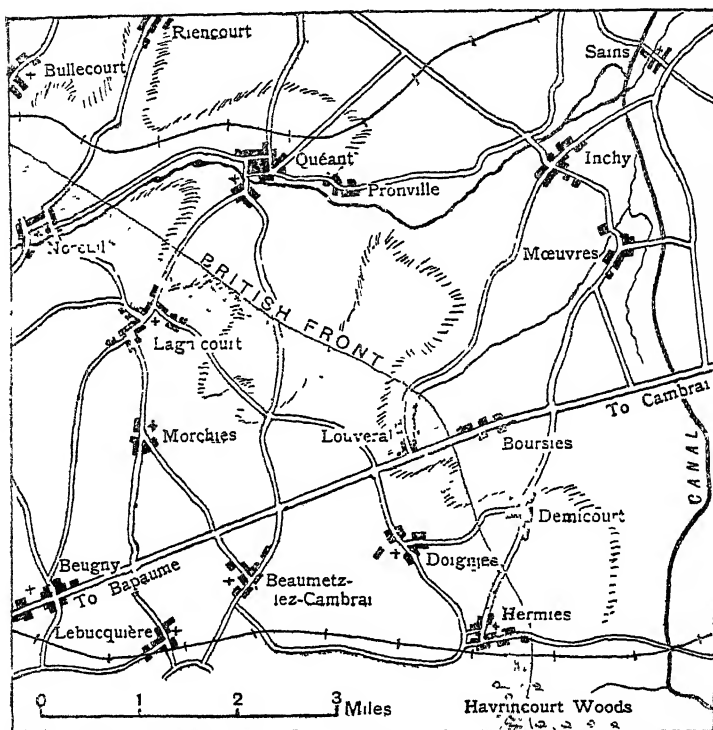
and many guns, including four 8-inch howitzers, which he had not had time to remove.

But the rough weather had given him his breathing space, and his resistance was hardening. More guns had come up, and new divisions, including the 195th and the 5th and 78th Reserve, had arrived from the Eastern front. From the 14th onward counterstrokes were frequent south of the Scarpe, and on the morning of Sunday, the 15th, an attack by five regiments of the Prussian *April 15.*

Guard was launched on a six-mile front astride the Bapaume-Cambrai road, from Hermies to Noreuil. The assault failed completely, except at Lagnicourt, where for a moment the enemy gained a footing, only to be driven out an hour later. He left 300 prisoners in our hands and 1,500 dead in front of our positions. There was also heavy fighting around Monchy, where the famous 3rd Bavarians were in action—the division which had been hurried up in support at Loos, and had held High Wood in the Somme action of September 15, 1916. Their advance up Monchy hill in five columns was broken by our guns, and their losses were not less than 4,000.

Next day, Monday, 16th April, saw the great French attack on the southern part of the Siegfried Line, the consideration of *April 16.* which belongs to the following chapter. As we shall see, its success fell short of the hopes of its commanders, and it was incumbent on Sir Douglas Haig to press his advance towards Douai and Cambrai in order to weaken the enemy strength on the Aisne heights. So far as the British armies were concerned, their main task was finished, and their

duty now was subsidiary—to distract the enemy from Nivelle rather than to win their own special objectives. At dawn on Monday, the 23rd, the British attacked on an eight-



The German Counter-attack on the Bapaume-Cambrai Road,  
April 15, 1917.

mile front on both banks of the Scarpe against the line Gavrelle-Rœux-Guémappe-Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. South-west of Lens, in a subsidiary

assault, we advanced our front along the Souchez stream. The 17th Corps carried Gavrelle on the Arras-Douai road, and the enemy defences for two and a half miles south as far as Rœux cemetery. Beyond the Scarpe the 6th Corps won Guémappe, on the Arras-Cambrai highway. It was a day of sustained and desperate fighting, continued during the night, and prolonged far into the next morning. The enemy was in strength, and counter-*April 24.* attacked fiercely; and though units like his 35th and 18th Reserve Divisions made only a poor resistance, the 3rd Bavarians lived up to their old renown. Seven German divisions were engaged, and by the evening of the 25th we had advanced our line on the whole front from one to two miles, and by the capture of Guémappe had won the key of the country between the Cojeul and the Sensée. This section of the battle cost us dear; but it cost the enemy more, and his losses in these days' fighting were as high as any that he had suffered during the campaign. He left 3,400 prisoners in our hands, and it was estimated that the total casualties of the defence were at least thrice those of the assault. His misfortunes were due to the fact that he had to launch his counter-attacks across ground swept by our artillery, and, since the fight was fought in clear weather, he had no shelter from our omniscient aircraft.

The 28th and 29th of April saw the battle renewed north of the Scarpe. The enemy had on the 9th lost his third position from Fampoux for some miles southward, but on the left of our front he was in his second position till the 12th, and at the moment was holding his third line of defence from



Gavrelle northward. On the 28th we drove him out of it on a two-mile front at Arleux-en-Gohelle, and won ground at Oppy and on the western slopes of Greenland Hill between Gavrelle and Rœux, taking over 1,000 prisoners. South of the Scarpe we advanced our line to the north of Monchy. The enemy was fighting stubbornly for his Douai positions, for we were already half-way from Arras to that city, and only the Drocourt-Quéant line barred the way. The countryside falls in long, easy slopes to the Douai plain, and no hill or river gave a natural protection. The Germans had to stop the gap with men, and let it be readily admitted that they showed a stalwart resolution. But not less was the resolution of the attack. A correspondent has written of the doings of one unit, those Newfoundlanders who had borne so heavy a burden on the first day of the Somme:—

“In company with certain English troops they had pushed to the farthest point of our advance in a most difficult section of the battle area, when they were met by a counter-attack in two columns, the enemy being in overwhelming force. Some few were apparently cut off, but the main body fell back, holding the German masses at arms’ length. Reaching a trench in advance of our main positions, the enemy, checked by our fire, dropped into and occupied it. Then came the Newfoundlanders’ opportunity, and the next half-hour saw such slaughter of Germans as has only been witnessed perhaps once or twice in this battle. It is believed that no enemy got back, but in the trench and on the ground over which they had come there were between 1,200 and 1,500 dead.”

The close of April marked the end of the Battle of Arras as originally planned. That plan, in its

ultimate objective, involved the destruction of the northern pivot of the Siegfried Line, and the consequent reduction of the whole position. But the failure of the French at the southern pivot made this great scheme impossible in the immediate future. Two tasks now lay before the British Commander-in-Chief. The scheme of the attack on the Siegfried pivots had not been his. His original plan had been to cut off the enemy in the Arras-Bapaume salient by flank attacks and win at the same time the Vimy Ridge. After the German retreat it is probable that he would have contented himself, had he been solely responsible, with carrying Vimy, and then would have flung his weight into the Flanders operation. The action against the Siegfried pivots was Nivelle's conception, accepted by the Allied Governments, and, once begun, it could not readily be broken off. Sir Douglas Haig had, therefore, to work with a double aim. He had to continue his efforts in the Arras area, partly to ease the pressure on the new French positions on the Aisne, partly in order that when the time came for breaking off the battle in this sector he should be able to leave his front in a favourable position for future operations. Likewise he had to prepare for that great assault upon the German right wing in Flanders which had long ago been decided upon as the main British enterprise of the summer. The fighting of May was, therefore, in a different category from that of April. The initial impetus had gone, the main strategical end had not been attained, and, as during the last phase of the Somme, it was an affair of local offensives and limited objectives.

The main attack was made on Thursday, 3rd

May, on a twelve-mile front from the Acheville-

*May 3.* Vimy road, north of Arleux, to a point in the Siegfried Line at Bullecourt, south of the Sensée. Its object was to distract the enemy in view of the new French attack impending on the Aisne. Our troops crossed the parapets at 3.45 a.m., just before dawn, and were faced by a stubborn resistance. On our left the Canadians of the First Army broke through the strong Oppy-Méricourt line, and took the village of Fresnoy, crippling the German 15th Reserve Division, which had just been brought up preparatory to a counter-attack for the recovery of Arleux. In the wood north of Oppy we forced our way forward, encountering the 1st and 2nd Reserve Divisions of the Prussian Guard. On both banks of the Scarpe, at Rœux and the ridge called Infantry Hill east of Monchy, we advanced our front, and farther south made progress near Chérisy. On the right the Australians of the Fifth Army carried the front and support trenches of the Siegfried Line\* at Bulle-

\* Some idea of the strength of the Siegfried position may be gained from the following details. There were two main lines—the first line and the support line. One hundred and twenty-five yards in front of the first line was a belt of wire 25 feet broad, and so thick that it was impossible for a man lying on the ground to see through it. In the line itself were double machine-gun emplacements of ferro-concrete 125 yards apart, and other lesser emplacements were dotted all over it. The communication trenches were exceptionally broad and deep. More belts of wire defended the support line, which was the main line of defence. Here a continuous tunnel had been dug in the chalk at a depth of over 40 feet. It had been constructed entirely by Russian prisoners, and every 35 yards or so were exits with flights of forty-five steps. The tunnel was roofed, lined and bottomed with 9-inch by 3-inch

court, and parties of advanced troops actually reached the Quéant-Fontaine-lez-Croisilles road beyond. Our prisoners numbered close on 1,000.

We were not left in quiet possession of our gains. At once the enemy counter-attacked with determination, and his artillery shelled heavily our new positions. The struggle lasted all day and far into the night, and under the pressure of the incessant attacks our centre gradually retired, till, except for small lengths of line at Fontaine-lez-Croisilles and on both banks of the Scarpe, it was back in the trenches it had occupied before the assault began. Here the enemy was stayed. He had compelled us to relinquish our winnings, but he could not recover any of the ground he had already lost. On our flanks we fared better. The Canadians clung to Fresnoy, and the Australians still held the Siegfried support line at Bullecourt.

The situation now resolved itself into a struggle for three points on which the enemy set high value—Fresnoy, Rœux, and Bullecourt. On the 8th of May, very early in the morning, after a heavy bombardment, a German division *May 8.*—the 15th Reserve—attacked our positions north-east of Fresnoy village, which, since the enemy held Acheville and Méricourt, were dangerously exposed. They entered some of our trenches, but were promptly ejected by a counter-attack. At 8 a.m.,

timbers, and had numerous rooms opening off it. It was lit throughout by electricity. Large 9-inch trench mortars with concrete emplacements stood at the traverses, and were fed with ammunition from below. Strong machine-gun positions covered the line from behind. Small wonder that the Germans believed the position to be impregnable.

supported by two other divisions, the 4th Guard Reserve and the 5th Bavarians, which cut in on the flank, they renewed the attack on a wide front, and compelled us to fall back from the salient formed by Fresnoy village and wood. Next day we retook the wood, and held it thereafter. Fresnoy was one of the few cases in the campaign of a place won by us and held for more than twenty-four hours which the enemy succeeded in recapturing.

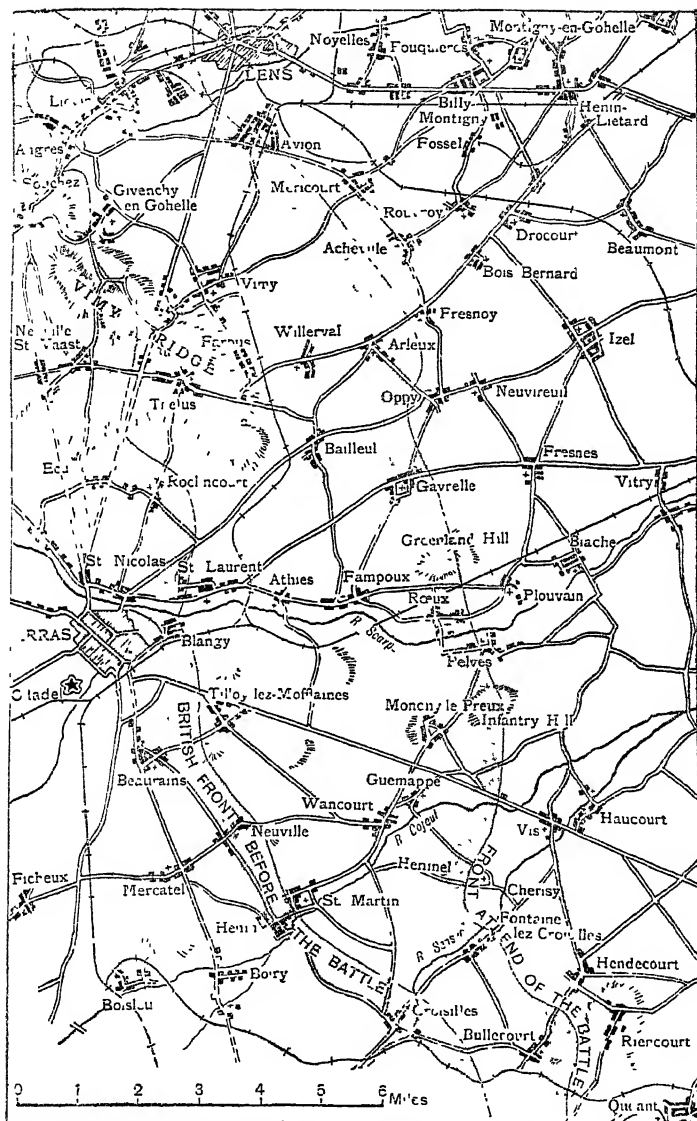
In the centre there was steady fighting. On 5th May, and again on the night of 10th May, we were busy pressing forward south of the Scarpe in the neighbourhood of Infantry Hill. There were many counter-attacks, and one on the night of 10th May, when *flammenwerfer* were employed, was of exceptional violence and complete futility. The following night, 11th

May 11. May, we attacked in some force on both sides of the Scarpe. On the south bank we took Cavalry Farm, on the Arras-Cambrai road, and a mile of trenches north of it. On the left bank of the river we carried Rœux cemetery and the Chemical Works in the neighbourhood of Rœux station,

May 12- taking some hundreds of prisoners. On 12th May we took the enemy's position on a front of one and a half miles between Rœux and Greenland Hill, and by the 14th the whole of Rœux village was in our hands. Two

May 16. days later a fresh German division was used in a counter-attack; but though we were forced to give ground at first, we re-established all our positions before evening, and the waves of assault fell back with heavy losses.

But the great episode of this final stage of the



The Battle of Arras—Second Stage.

Battle of Arras was the struggle in the Siegfried Line around Bullecourt, where the Lehr Regiment of the 3rd Guard Division—the “Cockchafer” \*—toiled to win back the ground lost on 3rd May, and the Australians and British troops of the Fifth Army sought in their turn to increase their winnings. The massive strength of the Siegfried Line was hard enough to force; but not less formidable were the machine-gun positions behind—linked concreted pits protected by steel coverings, through an orifice of which the guns fired a few inches above the level of the ground. The Australians had carried this section on 3rd May with superb audacity, and they showed the same coolness in defence. Mr. C. E. W. Bean has thus described one episode :—

“At noon on the first day the heads of Germans were seen at various points, and presently on they came, out of the sunken road which our advanced troops had occupied during the earlier hours, diving from shell-hole to shell-hole, two or three hundred of them together, for all the world like a school of seals. It was a new method of attack, and it was well carried out, but it was indescribably funny to watch. It was wiped out by our machine guns and rifles. The men stood breast-high over the parapet, with cigarettes in their mouths, and shot as they have seldom had the chance to shoot. . . . The German trench mortars kept up a most powerful bombardment of the right, and under it the right half of the defence were gradually forced back completely on to our left. A Western Australian unit took up the fight and bombed back along the whole trench to the limit of the objective, and again it was driven back. At 10 o'clock at night the Germans counter-attacked again furiously down the trench. We were holding barely 500 yards of the Hindenburg Line by this time, and there were signs of attacks from the left rear as well as from the right. At that moment, when things seemed almost past praying for, the word to retire came along

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\* For their previous doings see Vol. XVI., p. 54.

part of the line. The men whom it reached flung it back. 'Who said so?' they asked. 'What officer of ours gave that order?' The officers and men there had determined that, if it came to the worst and the Germans closed entirely round them, they would cut their way back through the enemy. But though the German *moral* has from the first been exceedingly good, it never came to that . . . With Germans on three sides of them and counter-attacked day and night, the Australians still held a position not often paralleled in the history of this or of any other war."

The situation was, indeed, a grave one; for on the left Bullecourt village projected on a kind of promontory, and to the right was the Riencourt ridge with Quéant behind it, and both positions were occupied by the enemy. The Australians' hold on the Siegfried Line was the ugliest kind of salient. On 7th May they found touch with our troops who were in the western skirts of Bullecourt, and next day ten of our men were rescued who had been in Bullecourt since the 3rd of May. By the 12th the greater part of the village was in our possession, though parties of the enemy still held out in the south and south-western outskirts. Then came the counter-attacks, more especially upon the Australians in the Siegfried Line. The Lehr Regiment had rehearsed every detail of their work; but two minutes after the assault was delivered at dawn on the 15th the plan had melted into air. The Australians, gallantly assisted by London troops, turned their defence into a most brilliant offensive. To quote Mr. Bean again:—

"Two things happened. First, down from the skies came the British barrage, and all speak of it as one of the finest barrages ever put up. It drew a line just beyond the Germans, and on to that line there thundered heavy shells and



shrapnel and trench mortar bombs, so that it was more dangerous for the Germans to go back than to go forward. Secondly, over the top, straight at them, came a counter-attack of Australians, organized at once on the spot by the company officers of the New South Wales battalion holding the trench. The Germans ran before it and dropped into the trench again at the extreme far end of the Australian position, where they had first entered. Thus, cooped up between our barrage behind them and our troops holding them in front, they stood at bay for the moment in a short length of trench. . . . They remained in their corner for about three hours. Then the same Australian battalion—there was only the normal garrison of the place in the actual fighting from first to last—delivered its two counter-attacks up the trenches. It was broad daylight, and I do not think that a single German of those then in the place reached the German lines.”

On 17th May we completed the capture of Bullecourt village. On the 20th we struck at the Siegfried Line between that point and Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. On the morning of that day, after a stiff fight, the whole of the enemy's front position was captured. In the evening we attacked the support line, and carried it on a front of a mile. All counter-attacks were repulsed, and on the 26th and 27th of May we secured our position beyond danger.

The battle was now drawing to its close. On Sunday, 3rd June, our advanced posts were attacked south-west of Chérisy, and on the same day we gained and lost ground in an attack by the Canadians on the electric power-station south of the Souchez river. On the 5th we won the power-station, and on the 6th we took a mile of the enemy position north of the Scarpe on the western slopes of Green-

land Hill. But these actions were in the nature of feints, for the centre of gravity had now shifted north of the Lys.

On 5th May the French carried the Craonne plateau, and thereby won their immediate object on the Aisne. Sir Douglas Haig's subsequent operation had, therefore, been either for the purpose of securing or rounding off the ground won, or of misleading the enemy by a show of activity in an area not seriously threatened. Already the Arras front was being thinned, and troops and guns were moving northward. On 20th May the French extended their line to the Omignon river, thereby taking over again that part of the front which they had relinquished to the British on 26th February. As early as 24th May the German bulletins reported great activity in the district between Ypres and Armentières, and in the early days of June they daily informed the world that the British artillery was shelling the Wytschaete-Messines ridge. They foresaw a new offensive, but they did not guess how strange and cataclysmic that offensive was to be.

The Battle of Arras may be regarded with some truth as an action complete in itself. It lasted just over a month. It was a limited victory—that is to say, it attained completely its immediate objectives ; but owing to events outside the control of the British Command, it did not produce the strategical result upon the Western front as a whole which was its ultimate design. It was, therefore, an action on the Somme model, a stage in the process of attrition, the value of which must be measured in terms

of its effect upon the enemy's *moral* and the efficiency of his military machine. Judged by such standards it compared brilliantly with every previous British advance. In a month we took more than 20,000 prisoners, 257 guns (of which 98 were of heavy calibre), 227 trench mortars, and 470 machine guns.\* If we contrast the first twenty-four days of the Somme with the first twenty-four days of Arras, we shall find that in the latter battle we took four times the amount of territory, engaged double the number of German divisions, and had half the casualties. We had advanced many stages in our knowledge of the new methods of war.

But such figures do not exhaust the criterion. The vital fact was that we had defeated the enemy's plan. When his too hasty retreat to the Siegfried Line deprived him of the chance of taking the Allies at a disadvantage, he determined to avoid battle, to create a stalemate on the West, and to set his hopes of victory on the success of his submarine campaign. The first day of Arras shattered that illusion. He lost the Vimy Ridge, one of his most cherished observation posts; he lost Bullecourt, where the Drocourt-Quéant or Wotan Line joined the main Siegfried position; he lost between six and seven miles of the cherished Siegfried Line itself. The defences of which he had boasted for six months had proved no more impregnable than Thiepval or Guillemont. The German press and the German *communiqués* concealed their failure by declaring that the British had been unable to "break

\* Between 1st July and 18th November, on the Somme, we took 38,000 prisoners, 29 heavy guns, 96 field guns, 136 trench mortars, and 514 machine guns.

through," and that there was no "Hindenburg Line" except that on which Hindenburg chose to stand. The first argument was idle, for each day we had fought with strictly limited objectives which—with a few exceptions—we had accurately attained. The theory of some spectacular "break through" had long existed, so far as Sir Douglas Haig was concerned, only in the imagination of German military critics. The second was a quibble with words, for what we called the Hindenburg Line they called the Siegfried, and their anxiety for its integrity was shown in the furious counter-attacks with which they attempted to recover points such as Rœux and Bullecourt that threatened its safety.

The German losses during this period on the Western front were not less than 350,000. They had 104 divisions in action, and of these seventy-four by the end of May had to be redrawn to refit. The whole German plan of defence was based on the impregnability of the old lines from the sea to Arras, and of the Siegfried Line from Arras to the Aisne. When they lost ground they were compelled to throw in large numbers of their best troops in the attempt either to win it back or to gain time for the construction of other lines in the rear. We therefore achieved our major purpose of inflicting great losses on the enemy and using up his reserves. It was still hammer play: we were still painfully destroying the wall, and had not reached that nodal point which would involve a widespread cataclysm. But each blow of our hammer had gone truly home.

The weakness of the Eastern front had enabled Germany to transfer to the West many of her best

units, though these had usually been replaced by troops from the interior depots. But there were indications that, in spite of Hindenburg's new divisions, she was having difficulties with regard to man-power. New regiments, for example, which had been destined to form new divisions, were broken up to provide drafts for divisions shattered in the battle. More significant still, there was a general reduction in the establishment of infantry battalions from 1,000 to 750. But the slow weakening of the German machine was best shown by the new tactical device, the use of *Sturmtruppen* and *Stosstruppen*,\* which the course of the action revealed. Germany had always been inclined to bemuse herself with the idea of "crack" corps, from the Pomeranian giants of the Great Elector to the Prussian Guards and the Brandenburgers of the present campaign. To some extent the idea was a just one: each army has its units who are respected beyond others. But the German plan was based not, as with the French and British, on the record of such troops in actual warfare, but on some supposed physical or moral pre-eminence which entitled them to be set apart from the rest of the line, specially trained, and used only in desperate emergencies. The ordinary German soldiers could not stand up to the Allies at close quarters. "Let us therefore find or make troops who can," ran the

\* A battalion of *Stosstruppen* was attached to each army corps. This battalion contained four companies of assault, each 100 strong—a machine-gun company with six machine guns, a company of bombers, a company of flame-throwers, and a battery of assault. The battalion commander had usually a captain's rank. Motor cars were attached to each battalion for rapid transport.

argument—a curious tribute to the superior Allied prowess.

But the use of such “shock-troops” was a confession of failure. They fought gallantly, and now and then achieved their purpose, but they were in flagrant contradiction to the whole German theory of war. This skimming of the cream from the army left each time the residuum weaker; in her efforts to raise the drooping *moral* of the ordinary line Germany still further depressed it. Moreover, the practice wrecked the “machine.” In the old warfare a picked cohort of knights might cut its way through a mob of footmen, but with the mass-armies of Germany the foundation was the equal discipline and the even efficiency of every unit. For in a machine one wheel should not be of better workmanship or one crank of finer temper than the rest, since the strength of the machine is not its strongest but its weakest part. The well-oiled and remorseless modern engine which had rolled smoothly through Flanders and Picardy in the early autumn of 1914 was changing to that archetypal form of all barbaric armies—the sullen commonalty and the spirited and privileged few.

## CHAPTER CXXXV.

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE AISNE.

The French Position at the Aisne on April 1, 1917—The German Retreat—Configuration of Front from Laffaux to Auberive—The Heights of the Aisne—Nivelle's Plan—German Dispositions—French Dispositions—The French "Preparation"—The Attack of 16th April—The Struggle on the Aisne Heights—The Fight at Ville-aux-Bois—The Struggle from the Aisne to Rheims—The Battle of Moronvilliers opens—Description of the Terrain—Anthoine's Disposition—Capture of Mont sans Nom and Mont Blond—French carry the Western Spurs on the Aisne—Capture of Ville-aux-Bois—Capture of Mont Haut—Capture of Laffaux—Capture of Auberive—Summary of French Gains—Petain appointed Chief of the General Staff—Petain succeeds Nivelle as Commander-in-Chief—Capture of Mont Perthois—Fall of Craonne and the Plateau of California—The Fight around Laffaux Mill—Anthoine carries Mont Cornillet and controls the Moronvilliers Heights—German Counter-Attacks—Use of *Stosstruppen*—Estimate of the Battle—The Flaw in Nivelle's Plan.

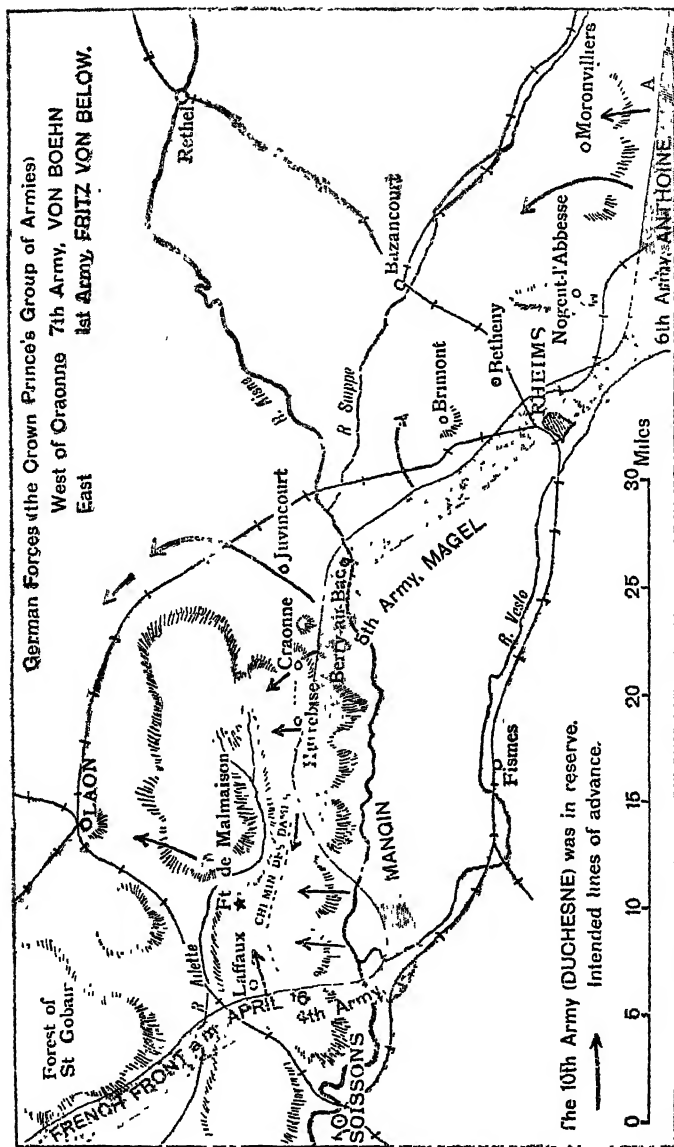
**I**N the first Battle of the Aisne, in September 1914, the Allies had won the crossing of the river from the Forêt de l'Aigue above Compiègne to Berry-au-Bac, where the great Roman highroad from Rheims to Laon crosses by the most famous ford in France. At one point the assault of the British 1st Corps had reached the Chemin des Dames north of Troyon and the crown of the Aisne plateau. But von Kluck's attack in January

1915 had driven a broad shallow wedge into that front, and given him the south bank of the river from Missy-sur-Aisne to a little east of Chavonne. From that date onward there had been no action of any significance between Soissons and Rheims. East of Rheims the western end of the Champagne-Pouilleuse had been part of the terrain of the great battle of September 1915, and in October of the same year von Heeringen had striven in vain to cut the Rheims-Châlons railway by an attack between Prunay and Auberive. But since then the whole section had been stagnant, and thinly held by both sides, while the main conflict raged around Verdun and the Somme.

The retreat of the Germans during February and March 1917 had altered the configuration of the French front in the western end of the area. The advance along the heights south of the Ailette had brought their left just west of the village of Laffaux. Thence it ran to the Aisne west of Missy, and continued along the south bank to a mile or so east of Chavonne. From that point it turned to the north-east by Soupir, across the Aisne-Oise Canal below the tunnel to Troyon and the Chemin des Dames. It then left the ridge, and continued below the south edge till it struck the marshy flats south of Craonne, whence it continued west of Ville-aux-Bois to Berry-au-Bac. From the Aisne crossing there it ran west of the Rheims-Laon highway to Bétheny, covered Rheims, and passed south of the Nogent l'Abbesse and Moronvilliers heights to the upper streams of the Suippe.

This section of the front was in length some fifty miles, and its physical character was most in-





Second Battle of the Aisne. Sketch showing General Nivelle's projects for the Attack.

tricately varied. The Heights of the Aisne, on which a century before a foreign invader had defied the genius of Napoleon, were, as we knew to our cost, one of the strongest positions in Europe. The limestone plateau, curiously wooded and cut by deep ravines, had been turned by the enemy into a veritable fortress. The sides of the glens had been forested with barbed wire; tunnels had been driven through the ridge, which formed perfect concealed communications; machine guns had been cunningly emplaced at every angle of fire; and the many natural caves in the limestone had been converted into underground shelters and assembly stations. Moreover, he had all the view-points, and from the Chemin des Dames commanded everywhere the French lines. His only weakness was that he held an acute salient, the apex of which was south of the Aisne. The first section, therefore, was the salient from Vauxaillon above the Ailette by Missy to Troyon, on the Chemin des Dames, a front of some twenty miles. It was a region of long, narrow spurs abutting in bold bluffs on the river valley. Along the hog's back from which they sprung ran the western part of the Chemin des Dames. Of these spurs there were five specially notable—from west to east, those running from Laffaux to Missy; from above Allemant to Chivres; from Vaudesson to Vauxelles; from Malmaison to Vailly; and from Ostel to Chavonne. Each spur was serrated like a comb by ravines, and radiated under-features.

The second section comprised the eastern end of the Aisne heights which culminated in the promontory of Craonne, rising from the plain like the hull of a ship at sea. Here the plateau narrowed

at one place to the width of a hundred yards, and also reached its greatest elevation—over 650 feet—near the farm of Hurtebise. Its wooded sides rose steeply both from the Aisne and the Ailette. North of it, across the Ailette, rose a second broad plateau, for the most part lower than the Chemin des Dames ridge, but at its eastern end rising to nearly the same height. Beyond it again lay Laon upon its little hill.

The third section extended from Craonne to Bétheny, a distance of some twelve miles, where the front, after leaving the marshy woods south of Craonne, entered the rolling Champagne country, unbroken save for the heights of Brimont and Fresnes, where the German guns were placed for the bombardment of Rheims. East of that city from Nogent l'Abbesse stretched for seven or eight miles as far as Auberive the wooded hills of the Moronvilliers group. Such was the nature of the ground on which General Nivelle designed to fight the coming battle.

It was a difficult terrain, for at all points save Troyon the enemy had the dominating positions. The idea in the mind of Nivelle was to make of the gap between Craonne and Brimont an alley into the plain of Laon. But this alley was everywhere commanded, and success was not possible at any one place unless it were simultaneously won at others. To win the alley the hills of Brimont and Fresnes must be turned on one side, and the Craonne heights secured on the other. But the Craonne ridge could not be won unless the western end of the Chemin des Dames was also mastered, and the alley would remain insecure on the south unless the enemy were

driven from the Moronvilliers group. Moreover, in each section the tactical difficulties were immense, owing to the skilful siting of the German line.

When a problem so intricate presents itself to a commander in the field the natural method is to take it in stages. On the analogy of the Somme the obvious plan would have been to concentrate upon the Heights of the Aisne with the first blow, and on the Rheims hills with the second ; for, once these were won, the gate of the Laon plain was unlocked. The French objective, as we have seen, was to break the southern pivot of the Siegfried Line at Laon in the same way as Haig was aiming at the northern pivot around Douai and Cambrai. The Germans had opened the sluices of the Oise, and by flooding the valley from Berthenicourt to Tergnier had placed an insuperable obstacle to our advance in that direction. The early days of April had shown that the plateau of St. Gobain was too hard a nut to crack. The attack on Laon must, therefore, come from the south and the south-east. So much was clear ; but in the method of that attack Nivelle deliberately departed from the tactics of the Somme—the advance by steady stages to limited objectives. The Aisne was for him a familiar battle-ground. He had fought there as a colonel of artillery in September 1914, and again as divisional commander in the Quennevières fighting of June 1915. Verdun had brought him fame, and that fame had been won by enterprises of peculiar audacity and brilliance. His great winter battles in 1916 had followed the Somme method of limited objectives, but Nivelle had never regarded this method as the final device in war. He had written to a friend : “ The

trench warfare which we have been waging on the same ground for two years is only one of the numerous forms of war—a form which cannot last for ever, because it cannot bring a decision. . . . Be sure that the essential principles of war, those of Napoleonic strategy, have lost none of their value. . . . The moment approaches when the decisive blow will be struck by the stronger and more resolute.” He considered, no doubt with reason, that the last word had not been spoken in the tactics of the war, that new devices might be found, and that the enemy’s stolid strength might be broken by other means than slow sapping.

His aim now was the “decisive blow”—not to weaken but to crush, not to “break up” but to “break through.” With splendid self-confidence he promised himself Laon as the result of the first day’s action, and such a gain was inconceivable unless he really succeeded in crumbling the whole enemy defences. As in the previous winter at Verdun, he told his Government precisely what he meant to do, and by what hour he would accomplish it. He communicated his own self-reliance to his colleagues, and no offensive was ever undertaken with more assurance and hope. The French armies mustered their strength for a great effort. His plan was to force the Aisne heights in one bold assault from west, south, and south-east; at the same moment to carry the Rheims heights from the north; and at the same moment to launch his centre through the gap between the two into the plain of Laon. Next day a fresh army would attack the Moronvilliers *massif* to distract the enemy’s counter-attack, and protect his own right flank. In

the centre he would use the new French Tanks—machines less stout and solid than the British, but with greater speed.

The French armies were still divided into three main groups—the Eastern, now under de Castelnau ; the Central, under Petain ; and the Northern, under Franchet d'Esperey. A fourth group, a reserve group, was under Micheler, the former commander of the Tenth Army. Nivelle proposed to put into action the centre and right wing of Micheler's group from the Ailette to Rheims—in order, the Sixth Army, under Mangin, between Laffaux and Hurtebise, and the Fifth Army, under Mazel, between Hurtebise and Rheims. The Tenth Army, under Duchesne, was in reserve. East of Rheims, the day after the main attack, the Fourth Army, under General Anthoine, would begin the Moronvilliers battle. It was by far the largest front of attack seen on the West since the Marne, and the divisions of assault to be employed were three times those which Haig had used at Arras.\* Whatever our verdict on the result, let us do justice to the audacity and courage of Nivelle's conception. Like Browning's Grammarian, he "ventured neck or nothing" :

" That low man goes on adding one to one,  
His hundred's soon hit :  
This high man, aiming at a million,  
Misses an unit."

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\* It should be remarked that there is a limit to the size of a force which can be profitably employed in any single operation. An excessive force may paralyze its own efforts, as happened with Grant's attack on the Bloody Angle at Spottsylvania.

Unhappily, in a war of life and death it is results that count and not loftiness of aim, and the hundred hit is more valuable than the million missed.

On the German side the Army Group of the Imperial Crown Prince extended from the Oise to Verdun. In the area of attack two armies lay—the Seventh, under von Boehn, from La Fère to Craonne, and the First, under Fritz von Below (who had come from the Eighth Army opposite Riga), from Craonne to Champagne. The front was defended by not less than 350,000 infantry, and by a great mass of artillery and machine guns. It was regarded as one of the most important sections in the West, and orders had gone out that no ground must be relinquished, since every yard was vital. In that area there was no margin to play with; a crest was a crest, a view-point was a view-point, and, once lost, no equivalent could be found. “The first line,” ran one Army Order, “must be defended at all costs, and if it be lost the struggle must continue till it is recovered. *Our principal fighting line is our first line.*”

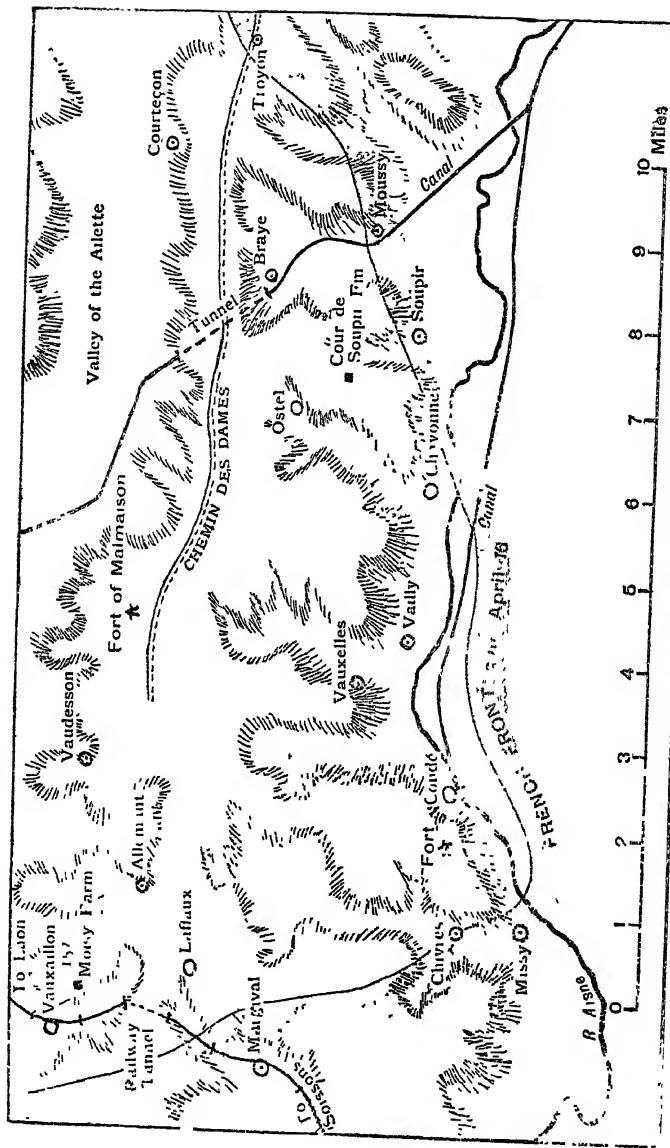
On 6th April the French “preparation” began from the Ailette to Rheims. On 10th April it was extended to the eastward from the  
*April 6–* Thuizy-Nauroy road to Auberive. That  
10. day the civilian population of Rheims was evacuated, for the enemy had begun to shell the much-battered city, and inflict new wounds on its great cathedral. The weather was snowy and wet, and aircraft observation was badly crippled. The

\* Order of General von Schüssler, commanding the 183rd Division on the Aisne, March 18, 1917.

French bombardment rose in a crescendo till on Sunday, the 15th, every gun spoke on the fifty-mile front. It was the kind of "preparation" to baffle the enemy, for he could not believe that the whole sector would be the area of attack, and he was unable to decide from the superior violence in any locality where the infantry would move. That night saw a blizzard of sleet, but just at dawn came a clearing of the sky. At 6 a.m. on the 16th the first French infantry crossed the parapets, and almost at once the pall of storm closed in again on the battlefield. *April 15.* *April 16.*

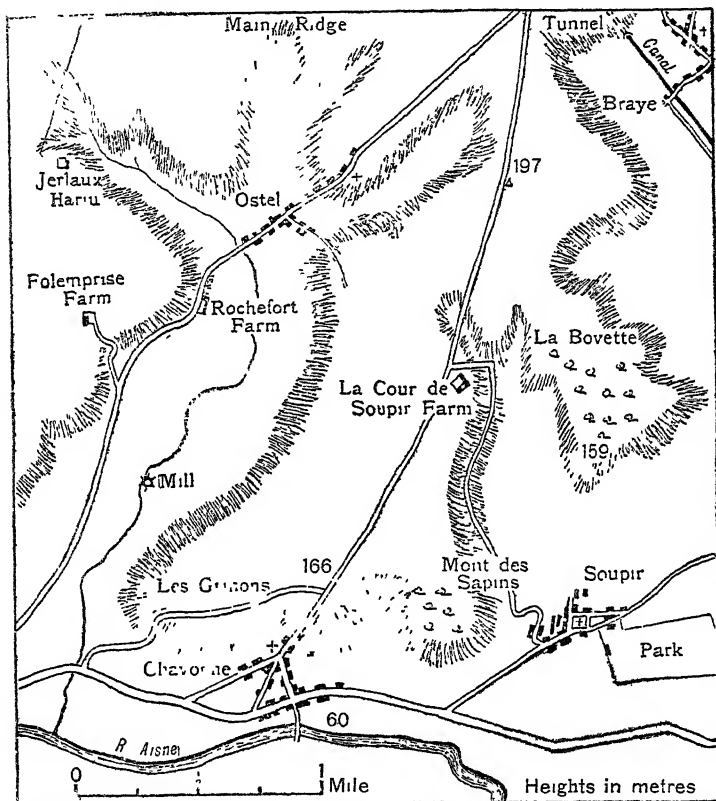
On the extreme French left a Colonial corps attacked the roots of the westernmost spur around Laffaux. They took Moisy Farm, east of Vauxaillon, and surrounded Laffaux, but were driven back by a counterstroke in the afternoon. Farther south, on the other side of the salient, the attack was directed against the Ostel-Chavonne ridge, a spur in some parts over 600 feet high. The French crossed the Aisne, broke through the two German lines on its northern bank, entered Chavonne, and struggled all day for the southern under-feature of the spur, which was named Les Grinons. The main assault failed, and by the evening the French centre was forced back to the edge of the river. But on the right a Chasseur battalion had stormed another under-feature called Mont des Sapins, and, in spite of many counter-attacks and a constant rain of bullets from the machine guns concealed in the shattered woods, they clung to their winnings, and held the approaches to the farm of La Cour de Soupir, on the main ridge. Farther east the little spur which runs from Courtaçon to Moussy had





Second Battle of the Aisne. The Attack on the Spurs of the Western Heights and on the Chemin des Dames. (French left attack.)

been forced, and the Moroccan infantry from Troyon had pushed westward along the Chemin des Dames and cut off the retreat of the enemy troops in Chivy.

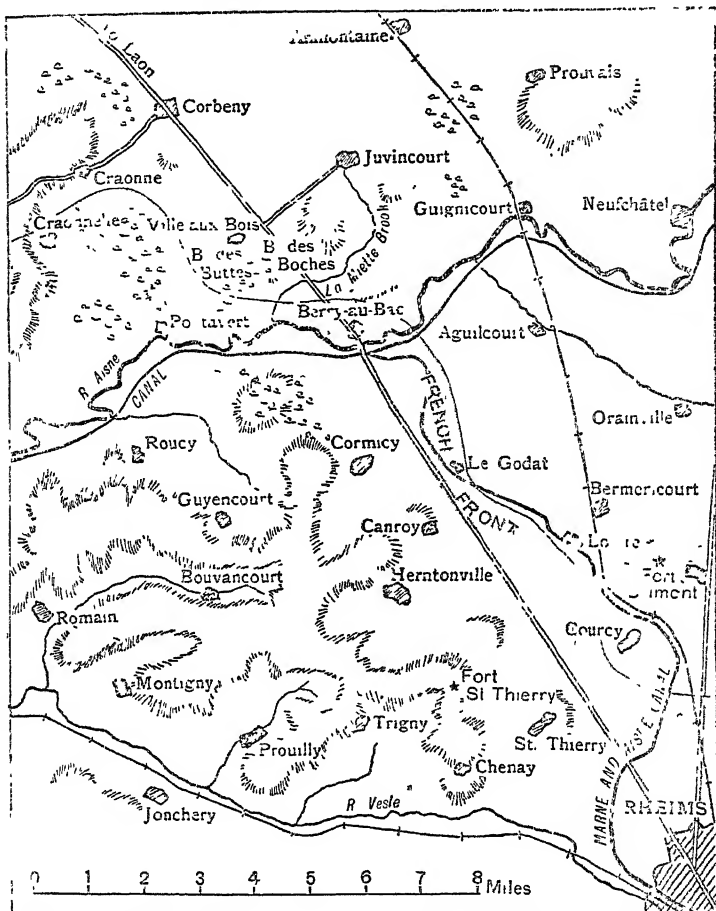


The Ostel-Chavonne Spur.

But the main attack in this section was to the east, where two corps had advanced along the crest of the plateau. Hurtebise Farm, at the narrows of the

ridge, was carried by another Colonial corps, and on the right the French entered the skirts of Craonne village. Beyond that lay the gap which it was hoped would prove the alley to the plain of Laon. Here Juvincourt was the immediate objective, and the approach was guarded by two little hills, outliers of the Craonne *massif*, the Bois des Buttes and the Bois des Boches, behind which lay the village of Ville-aux-Bois. Each was a machine-gun fortress, excavated into galleries, and with dug-outs sixty feet deep. They had been severely pounded by the French artillery, but they were strongly held by two Bavarian battalions, and till they fell Ville-aux-Bois could not be won or any use made of the gateway into the plain. The Parisians of the 31st Infantry Regiment stormed and held the Bois des Buttes, and south of Ville-aux-Bois the two German lines between that village and the Aisne were carried by the Tanks. The ground was not the most suitable for their work, and the fire from the Craonne heights, and perhaps certain flaws in their mechanism, put a large number of them out of action. But the evening saw the French well past Ville-aux-Bois on the south, and working up the hollow of the Miette towards Juvincourt. North of Ville-aux-Bois, however, they were firmly held by the machine-gun positions in Craonne, and the place itself was still untaken.

South of the Aisne, from Berry-au-Bac to Bétheny, the French front was curiously placed. From the Aisne to Le Godat it lay east of the Aisne-Marne Canal. From Le Godat to Courcy the canal was in front of it, and protected the German position, which was further supported by the Rheims-Laon



Second Battle of the Aisne. The Attack of the Centre between Craonne and Rheims.

railway embankment, and by the guns on the hill of Brimont. Here the French objective was the village of Loivre, and Berméricourt out in the plain,

the possession of which would turn Fresnes and Brimont from the north. In the first assault the French carried Berméricourt, but lost it before the evening. Farther south the east bank of the canal was won, and Loivre fell to a dashing charge. On the right a Russian brigade under General Lochwitzky, which had been in the Argonne the year before, fighting with desperate gallantry took Courcy and its château, but beyond them the German guns on the Rheims hills prevented any further advance.

The first day of the battle closed in driving sleet. Much had been won, notably the crowning point of Hurtebise on the Aisne plateau, one sentinel hillock of the gap between Craonne and the Aisne, and positions threatening Brimont and Fresnes. Some 11,000 prisoners had been taken, and many guns. But Nivelles was still very far from the gates of Laon.

Tuesday, 17th April, dawned in a hurricane of wind and snow. At half-past five the battle began on the left with the capture of Les Grinons, which must involve the fall of Chavonne and La Cour d'Espoir. At Hurtebise, at Ville-aux-Bois, at Loivre, at Berméricourt and Courcy the French beat off counter-attacks or secured their ground. Meantime east of Rheims General Anthoine's Fourth Army had opened its attack upon the Moronvilliers *massif*.

This new area demands a brief description. Between Nogent l'Abbesse, east of Rheims, and Moronvilliers lies a pocket of flat ground some seven miles wide around the little town of Beine. South and east of this basin, and bordering on the north the plain of Châlons, is a cluster of rounded hills,

feathered with firwoods, the watershed between the Vesle and the Suippe. The highest part, Mont Haut, is a little over 600 feet. This *massif* constituted a defence on the eastern flank of the German positions around Rheims, and a defence on the south of the Bazancourt-Apremont railway, which had been one of the objectives in the Champagne battle of 1915. It formed also a dangerous view-point over the whole plain of Châlons. The enemy was well aware of its importance, and had defended its flanks with mighty works—on the west the trench system west of the Thuizy-Nauroy road, on the east the network between Auberive and Vaudesincourt. All the hills had been tunnelled and ringed with forts. This area was held for the most part by troops of the 14th Corps in General Fritz von Below's First Army—the dispositions being, from west to east, the 29th, the 214th, the 58th, and the 30th Divisions—some 40,000 troops in line, and the same number in reserve. Its artillery strength was about 1,000 guns of all calibres.

The main strategical object of the French attack was to uncover the heights east and north of Rheims held by the enemy, and to drive him from the south bank of the Aisne, between the Aisne-Marne Canal and the Suippe, and broaden the entrance into the plain of Laon for Nivelles's centre. The Fourth Army was compelled to make a frontal attack, owing to the great strength of the German flanks, and a frontal attack against such a hill fortress was an enterprise not to be lightly undertaken. General Anthoine, the commander, was a Lorrainer of fifty-seven, who had been Chief of Staff to de Castelnau at Nancy; had commanded the 10th Corps in the

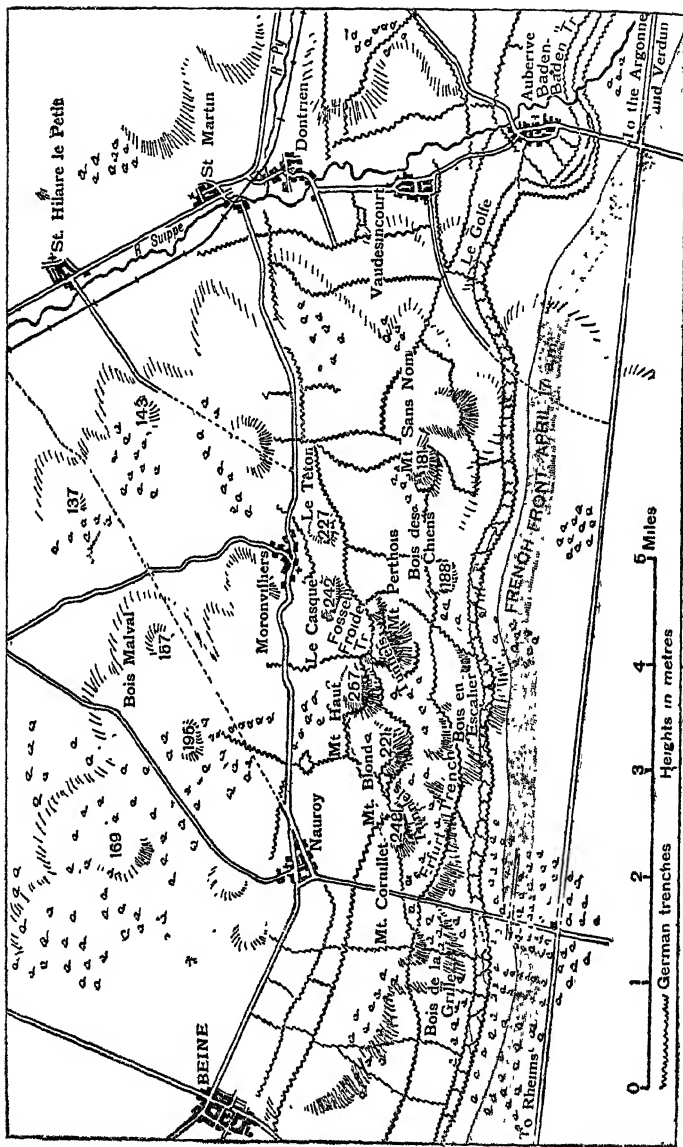
Argonne from September 1915 to June 1916; had fought under Micheler on the Somme; and had led the pursuit during the German retreat a month before. He had under him two corps—the left under Hely d'Oissel, whom we have already met in Flanders, and the right under General Dumas—a total of some 75,000 men. Anthoine, an old gunner, had not neglected his artillery. He had behind him such a massing of guns as had probably never been seen in an area of the same size, for he realized that the problem before him was insoluble unless the way was made plain for his infantry.

On the night of 16th April the French front in the section of assault lay just north of the Rheims-St. Hilaire road. The first German line was in the flats at the foot of the hills, the second was half-way up the slopes, and the third line was the fortified summits of Mont Cornillet, Mont Blond, Mont Haut, Mont Perthois, and Mont sans Nom. On each flank, at the Bois de la Grille in the west and at Le Golfe in the east, were two points of peculiar strength—labyrinths of trenches, barbed wire, steel cupolas, and concreted dug-outs. That night was the seventh of the French bombardment, and though the weather made observation difficult, it was clear that the enemy first line had been obliterated already, and broad paths cut in his support positions. Zero was fixed for 4.45 on the following morning. The dividing line between the two corps of assault was the country road that ran north from Prosnes. West of it Hely d'Oissel, with just under three divisions, had for his object the Bois de la Grille, Mont Cornillet, and Mont Blond; on

his right Dumas, with the equivalent of four divisions, advanced against Mont Haut, Mont Perthois, Le Téton, Mont sans Nom, Le Golfe, and Auberive.

The division on Hely d'Oissel's left, led by General Le Gallais, had the hardest task. It had to carry the wood of La Grille, and then form a defensive flank to protect the troops assaulting the heights. Its left regiment, the 95th, managed to press through the wood and win a section of the German second position north of it, but the rest of the division was held up by machine-gun redoubts and uncut wire. All through the day there was a fierce struggle, but by the evening the French were not beyond the old German first lines. On their right the division under General Lobit had better fortune. Its men, mainly from Gascony and the south-west, were far up the slopes of Mont Cornillet and Mont Blond before the watery daylight had come, and presently they were on the crest of both. But the whole division was in the air, owing to the unfortunate failure of the troops on its flanks, and was compelled in the evening to withdraw a little from the summit ridge of Cornillet. Meantime Dumas's left division, led by General Naulin, composed of Zouaves and African troops, were advancing on Mont Haut and Mont Perthois. They cut their way through the German first lines in the Bois-en-Escalier, but for the most part were held in the second line by the strong concrete works of the Erfurt trench. The Africans, on the right, however, reached the wooded slopes of Mont Perthois, and hung on in the face of counter-attacks. On their right General Eon's division—Parisians and Gascons—fought its way slowly through the Bois





**The Moronvilliers Hills, with the German Trench System (objective of the French right attack).**

des Chiens towards the hills called Le Casque and Le Téton—the “Helmet” and the “Teat.” East of it General Degoutte’s Moroccan division—one of the most famous in the French Army—had a brilliant success. In an hour they were on the crest of Mont sans Nom, while their right, a regiment of the Foreign Legion, made some progress in the trench labyrinth of Le Golfe. East of the Suippe, on Dumas’s extreme right, General Mordacq’s division broke through the enemy’s first line, and reached his second position at the Baden-Baden trench.

The result of the first day of the Moronvilliers battle was that the French centre had pushed well into the hills, reaching the summits of Mont sans Nom and Mont Blond, and falling just short of the summit of Cornillet; but that the left and right, fighting against strong German defences, were stayed in the enemy’s second line. The beginning had been brilliant, but the result of the battle was still on the knees of the gods. Resolute counter-attacks might drive in the sides of the new salient, and cut off the vanguard on the hills.

On Wednesday, the 18th, the French offensive was resumed throughout the whole battle-ground. On the left the knell was struck of the German salient on the western heights *April 18.* of the Aisne. The Colonials, already between Lafaux and Margival, pressed right across the Vregny spur, over the ravine which descends to Missy, and on to the Chivres ridge, where they took the village of Nanteuil-la-Fosse. Farther south, the French crossed the Aisne at Celles and Vailly, took Vailly, and rounded up two Saxon regiments on the spur

to the north. Chavonne and Chivy had fallen during the night. Ostel was taken, so was Braye-en-Laonnais, and the plateau above it up to the edge of Courtaçon. Great captures of guns, both field and heavy, were made, for the rush of Mangin's men had surprised all the enemy's calculations. Of all the western spurs he now possessed only the southern part of the Chivres spur, where stood the old Fort of Condé, and the little Vaudesson-Vauxelles spur to the east of it.

On the night of the 17th an encircling movement was begun against Ville-aux-Bois from the south-east. By six o'clock on the morning of the 18th the French had carried the village and the remaining hillock, the Bois des Boches, which brought them to the great Rheims-Laon highroad. That afternoon came the first of the serious German counter-attacks. Two fresh divisions were launched against the front between the Miette and the Aisne; but the French barrage mowed them down in the open, and the French machine guns destroyed what the barrage had spared.

Between the Aisne and Rheims there was little fighting; but that day in the Moronvilliers region saw a steady advance. Le Gallais remained inactive, while his artillery hammered the German second line, and Lobit consolidated his ground on Mont Blond and the Cornillet slopes. Naulin took both the summits of Mont Haut, the highest point of the range, and Eon prepared for the final attack on Le Casque. Degoutte's Moroccans pushed to the east of Mont sans Nom, and the men of the Foreign Legion carried the remains of Le Golfe

and the trenches south-west of Auberive. So far no great German counter-attack had developed here, but the French aircraft brought news of fresh enemy divisions hastening to the scene of conflict. Meantime the French Tenth Army, hitherto in reserve, was brought in between the Fifth and the Sixth, between Hurtebise and Craonne.

On Thursday, the 19th, the Colonials took Lafaux at last, and the point of the Chivres spur fell. Fort Condé was blown up by its garrison, *April 19.* who tried to retreat northward along the ridge, but were for the most part destroyed by the French barrage. This marked the end of the German salient which had endured since January 1915. The enemy was pushed up to the hog's back, and the villages of Aizy and Jouy were taken. The position now was that the French held all the spurs except a small part of the extreme western one, while the Germans held the Chemin des Dames at its western and eastern ends, but had lost the crest of the ridge for some three miles between Troyon and Hurtebise. The gap between the eastern terminal of the heights and the Aisne was cleared, but not yet open, for the Craonne guns still commanded it. That day there was a little progress between Berry-au-Bac and Bétheny. In the Moronvilliers area Le Gallais had to withstand a violent attack by the newly arrived 145th Prussian Regiment in La Grille Wood, while Lobit had the same experience on the slopes of Cornillet. A great tunnel had been driven through the crest of that hill, and the enemy, moving from it and from the northern slopes, attacked in waves till the late afternoon. Naulin still held the summit of Mont Haut,

but two new German divisions, the 5th and 6th, had arrived from General von Gündell's Army of Alsace, and had taken up position between Mont Blond and Le Téton and Le Casque. It was one of the bloodiest days of the battle. The 20th French Regiment, on the left, enfiladed by machine guns from the eastern slopes of Mont Perthois, fell just short of reaching the summit of Le Casque. The 11th Regiment, on the right, took Le Téton, swayed all day on the summit, and when night fell were still in possession. Meantime, on Anthoine's right, Auberive had at last fallen to the Legionaries of Degoutte's division, assisted by some of Mordacq's troops from across the Suippe.

On Friday, the 20th, the battle had temporarily died down in the west and centre, except for the capture of Sancy, the village at the narrows of the Chivres spur. But Anthoine was still heavily engaged. Le Gallais, having beaten off the great counter-attack, could do no more for the present, and Lobit was still held short of the summit of Cornillet. Naulin that day was forced back from the crest of Mont Haut, and Eon, after losing and regaining Le Casque, had finally to abandon it. He, however, held Le Téton, and on his right Degoutte's Moroccans had worked their way well to the north-east of Mont sans Nom. The first phase of the action had now concluded. Anthoine had won most of his objectives east of the Thuizy-Nauroy road. He was close on the crest of Cornillet, he held Mont Blond, the lower summit of Mont Haut, Le Téton, Mont sans Nom, Le Golfe, and Auberive. Above all, he had faced and defeated furious counter-attacks delivered by fresh

German divisions. But he held a dangerous salient, and the enemy possessed admirable starting-points for counter-strokes in the future. He made certain changes in his commands, transferring the left corps from Hely d'Oissel to General Vandenberg, and relieving Naulin's sorely tried division by one under General Brulard, Lobit's division by one under General Trouchaud, Le Gallais' by Hennoque's, and Degoutte's Moroccans by a division under Riberpray.

The closing days of April saw little activity on the left and centre of the battle-ground. There were counter-attacks in the Troyon area on the 20th, and on the 21st the French pushed north on the Chivres spur to beyond the narrows. *April 21-*

On the 25th there were counter-attacks *25.*  
at Hurtebise and Vauxaillon, and an abortive German move between Rheims and La Pompelle. On the 28th the French Command issued a summary of their gains. *April 28.*

Between the Ailette and the Suippe, since the 16th, there had been captured 20,780 prisoners, 175 guns, 119 trench mortars, and 412 machine guns. The enemy had lost all the banks of the Aisne from Soissons to Berry-au-Bac and all the spurs of the Aisne heights, while the French held the centre of the tableland. But the dominating height of Craonne had not fallen, and the hills of Brimont and Fresnes had not been turned. Anthoine had won the better part of the Moronvilliers *massif*, but not enough to complete any strategical purpose. In short, though there had been remarkable gains of ground, the major strategy had failed. The road to Laon was as firmly barred as ever.

The result was to produce a grave discouragement among the French people. It was not that their own losses were disproportionate, for, considering the nature of the obstacles attacked, they were on a moderate scale. But their hopes had been keyed too high, and they suffered a corresponding reaction. They had been promised Laon, and they would not be content with Ville-aux-Bois. The Tanks, from which they had looked for much, had done little; and the confidence in Nivelle's inspired audacity, induced by his Verdun exploits, had scarcely been justified. As a consequence, there was a sudden reversion of feeling in favour of the cautious tactics of the Somme, and of Petain and Foch, the chief exponents of those tactics in the French Army. On the evening of 28th April the Premier, M. Ribot, and M. Painlevé, who had recently succeeded General Lyautey as Minister of War, had a conference with Nivelle,

*April 30.* and on the 30th it was announced that the post of Chief of the General Staff at the Ministry of War had been revived, and that Petain had been appointed to fill it. The post was similar to that which Sir William Robertson held in Britain. The Chief of the General Staff in Paris was to act as the adviser of the Cabinet on all questions connected with the campaign and the co-operation of the Allied armies. He was to advise on all operation plans proposed by the various Commanders-in-Chief, and on all technical problems of *matériel*, transport, and the economics of war. The change, it was very generally felt, was only the precursor of others. If Petain's strategy was to be adopted, Petain must be put in supreme command. It was

clear to most observers that he was the most considerable leader, both in brain and character, that France had as yet produced, and the only place for such a man was the highest place. Moreover, he saw eye to eye with the great soldier commanding the British armies, now as a fighting force not less effective than those of France herself. Accordingly, on 15th May, Petain succeeded Nivelle as Commander-in-Chief of the French *May 15.* armies of the north and north-east—that is to say, the general in supreme command on the main battlefield—and Fayolle succeeded to Petain's old group command in the central sector. Foch succeeded Petain as Chief of the General Staff in Paris, a welcome appointment, for no greater master of Staff duties existed in the world at the time. These changes, drastic as they seemed, were the logical application of certain lessons learned in the Aisne battle, and they were insisted upon by M. Painlevé with that courage and honesty which had always honourably distinguished him.

Meantime the great fight was not over. Even if the major purpose had failed, much had been gained; but these gains were still unmaturing, and must be brought to that point where a true tactical advantage could be derived from them. In particular, the Craonne height must be won, and the Moronvilliers range finally controlled. The new battle opened in the latter area. On 30th *April 30.* April Hennoque's Breton division attacked La Grille Wood an hour after midday, but found its way barred by machine-gun redoubts and clouds of gas brought down by the northerly wind. Trouchaud's division at the same time reached the



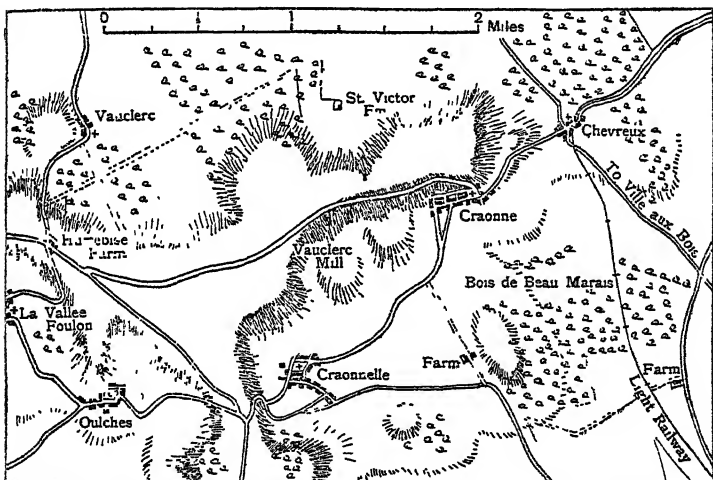
summit of Cornillet, but was forced to a standstill and repelled by furious counter-attacks. Brulard failed in his attack on the higher of the two summits of Mont Haut, but reached the top of Mont Perthois and the Fosse-Froide trench on the far side, and won the southern end of the Wood of Le Casque. All afternoon he was busy beating off counter-attacks, and at the end of the day had taken over 600 prisoners and seven guns. Eon held his ground on Le Téton, and Riberpray defeated an enemy attempt to take Mont sans Nom. For the next few days Hennoque struggled in La Grille Wood, which he did not clear till 8th May. On

*May 4.* 4th May Trouchaud made an unsuccessful attempt to turn Mont Cornillet by the west. Anthoine once again held his hand, and brought up fresh troops, while his guns began a new "preparation."

On Friday, 4th May, the battle reopened in the west. The front of attack was from Craonne to Brimont, but the main fighting was on the left, where the French entered Craonne, and carried two and a half miles of the enemy's first line. Pushing through the ruined village, two French companies climbed the great terminal bluff, and dug themselves in on the very top of the ridge, on the plateau called California. The Germans counter-attacked against the French right with two fresh divisions from the direction of Aguilcourt and the mouth of the Suippe, but they effected nothing, and lost 700 prisoners. The French had now obtained a footing on the long-sought eastern end of the Chemin des Dames, a point of immense tactical importance, since in looking from it no subsidiary

range beyond the Ailette blocked the vision, and the greater part of the railway between Rheims and Laon lay open to the eye. It remained to be seen if they would be suffered to hold it.

At dawn next day, Saturday, 5th May, the whole of the French left and left centre was in action. On the left the chief objective was the point of the German salient east of *May 5.*



The Hurtebise-Craonne Position.

Laffaux, on the Soissons-Laon highroad. The enemy was driven from Hill 157 east of Vauxaillon, and the battle raged around the Mill of Laffaux, which stood by the highway. Beyond the mill the ground fell steeply to the ravine which runs to Missy, and in the quarries on the edge of the scarp the Germans had a formidable position. A division of dismounted cuirassiers, supported by

Tanks, attacked at 4.45 a.m., and by ten o'clock had taken the mill and the trenches to the left of it, and later in the day pushed on to the narrows between the aforementioned ravine and that which runs north to the Ailette by the village of Allemant. Troops climbing up the ridge from Nanteuil-la-Fosse supported the right, and farther east an advance was made along the Fort Condé spur towards its junction with the main ridge. Above Craonne the whole of the California Plateau was held except the German work called the "Winterberg" at its western end above the Forest of Vauclerc. The position now was that all the Chemin-des-Dames ridge was in French hands except for some points on its northern edge, the sector for a mile on each side of the Fort de Malmaison, and the area around Courtaçon.

On Sunday, the 6th, there was severe fighting on the northern scarp between Laffaux Mill and the ravine of Allemant, where for the most part the French retained the positions they had won. More important still, moving out from Craonne, they took the hamlet of Chevreux in the plains, and so safeguarded their hold on the terminal with an advanced post. Already the three days of fighting had given them over 6,000 prisoners, including 150 officers. The following days saw a series of counter-attacks, delivered with fresh "shock troops," after the new German fashion. On the

*May 7-* nights of 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th  
*May 20.* May, and during most of the daylight hours of the 9th and 10th, there was bitter fighting all along the ridge, but most notably on the Vauclerc and California plateaux, and at

Chevreux in the plains. On the 16th the enemy attacked on a two and a half mile front north of the Mill of Laffaux, and two days later he made costly and fruitless efforts at California and north of Brayen-Laonnois. On the 20th he struck at the French front from Craonne to the Fort de Malmaison, but where he got through the barrage he was routed by the infantry, and left 1,000 prisoners behind him.

That day, Sunday, 20th May, saw the culmination of the Moronvilliers battle. The task that remained before the French was to round off their scattered gains in the *massif* May 20. by forming a line in which they could abide. The sector of attack was the highest ground from Cornillet to Le Téton, for the objectives west of the Thuizy-Nauroy road had been relinquished. Three new divisions, under Joba, Ferradini, and Aldebert, were detailed for the task, and at half-past four in the morning, after a mighty artillery bombardment, advanced to the assault. The Germans on Cornillet were ensconced, as we have seen, in the strong Flensburg trench just below the summit, in the great tunnel, and on the north slopes behind the crest. Against these Joba launched the 1st Regiment of Zouaves, the same which had fought under Grossetti on the Yser during the First Battle of Ypres. They raced the 250 steep yards to the summit, under a heavy enfilading fire from the Flensburg trench on their right, gained the crest, and moved down the farther side towards Nauroy. When the entrance to the tunnel was reached, it was discovered that the 600 troops in it were dead, asphyxiated by the blocking of the air-holes and by the French gas shells. Ferradini's division found

the enemy's position too strong to allow of an advance far down the northern slopes of Mont Haut and Mont Blond, but Aldebert was able to push well to the north of Le Casque and Le Téton. The whole summit ridge of the *massif* had now been secured. Since the opening of this section of the battle on 17th April there had been taken 6,120 prisoners, including 120 officers, 52 guns, 42 trench mortars, and 103 machine guns.

The remaining days of May and the month of June saw between the Ailette and the Suippe the usual aftermath of a great action. There were small advances of the French to improve their line, and many violent attacks by picked German troops to recover lost points of vantage. By making a list of such counter-strokes it is possible to master the strategic topography of the battle-ground, and learn which points the enemy considered vital. The chief was the California Plateau, the watch-tower over the plain of Laon. This was attacked on 21st, 23rd, and 24th May, and very violently on the night of 2nd June. Another was the cockscomb of the ridge near Hurtebise, another the ground around Cerny, and a third the apex of the western salient between Vauxaillon and Laffaux Mill. In the Moronvilliers region the disputed points were all the main summits. In this upland fighting, where tunnels, quarries, and grottoes were frequent, there was infinite scope for the initiative and resolution of companies, platoons, and individuals, and it was here that the French method showed in strong contrast with that of the enemy. The French did not skim the cream of their line to form special "shock" battalions. They trained specialists in

every unit, and then kept them there to lift the *moral* and efficiency of the whole. When the German *Stosstruppen* had obtained some success and had fallen back, they left the ordinary line to carry on their work, and that line was, as a rule, inadequate to the task. That was the reason why a German counter-stroke so often began brilliantly and ended in a fiasco. But every French battalion was trained to act as "shock" troops when so required, and therefore they held what they won, for the same men did the holding as had done the winning. This distinction was more than a difference of tactical theory; it was a difference in national character and philosophy of life. The sterling republican doctrine of the worth of the average man triumphed over the bureaucratic theory of disciplined serfs and privileged superiors. The ancient civilized conceptions of individuality and variety were more potent than the barbaric dogma of the mechanical and featureless mass.

The Second Battle of the Aisne lasted a little more than a month. It represented, as we have seen, in its main intention a departure from the policy of the Somme, a departure which after the first day or two was not persisted in. It did not achieve the aim of the French High Command, which was the dislocation of the southern pivot of the Siegfried Line, and to that extent may be written down a failure. It did not even, as at Arras, gravely endanger any vital enemy centre, and thereby put out of gear his whole plans for the summer. But it was far from being barren of results. It engaged and destroyed a very large number of German divi-

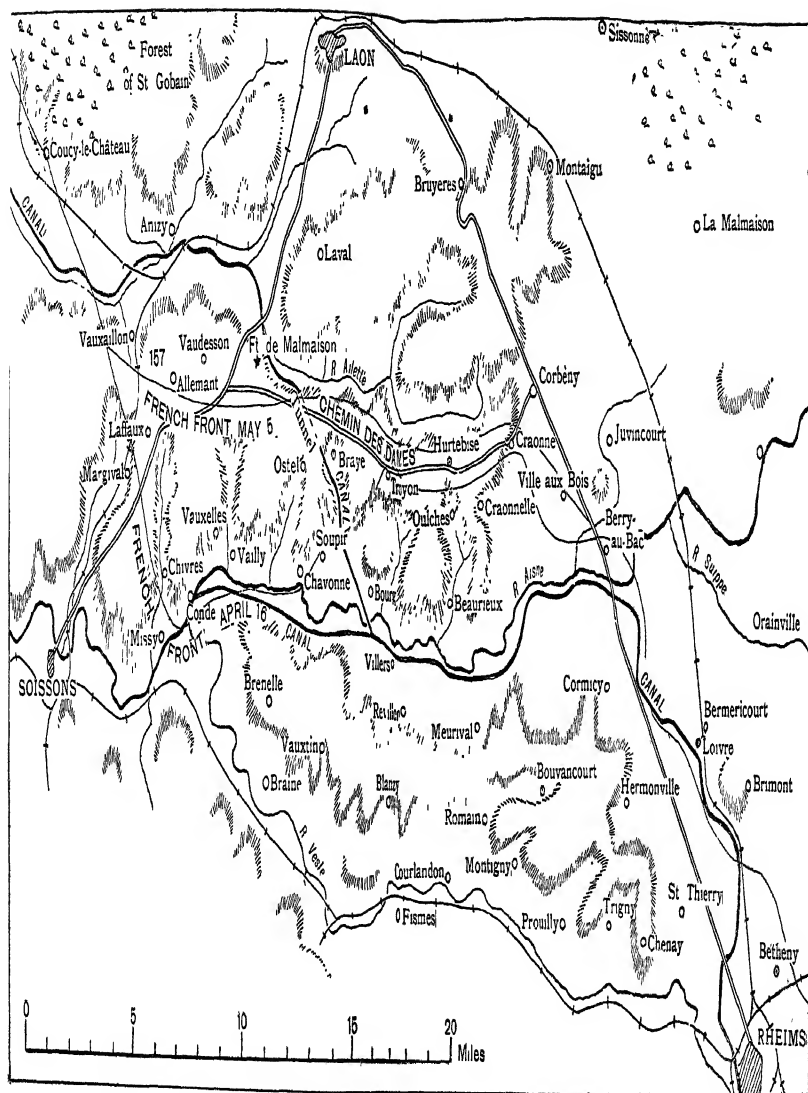
sions ; it used up a quantity of the best German " shock-troops ;" and it cost the enemy positions which were essential to his comfort, and, ultimately, to his security.

Nivelle's reach had been heroic, but it had exceeded his grasp. Undoubtedly there were as contributory aids to the failure of his major plan certain causes not strictly within his control. One was the weather on the opening day, which was vile even in that vile April. Another was the fact that the enemy had got wind of a great attack preparing, and had brought up his reserves and strengthened all his positions. A third was the breakdown of the Tanks, on which much store had been set. But, allowing for all these, it is difficult not to conclude that his plan of action was intrinsically faulty. He aimed at an attack everywhere along a broad front, with the idea of so occupying the enemy that he would be unable to concentrate men at the one or two vital points. But he forgot the fact that these vital points were commanded by certain most formidable German positions, and could not be won until these positions were also carried. But to carry them demanded a special effort, which the far-flung nature of his battle-line forbade. The crucial area was the alley-way between Craonne and the Aisne, through which the French centre hoped to sweep on Laon. But that alley-way was impracticable for any great movement until the eastern butt of the Aisne heights had been won, and that was obviously a problem which could not be solved in a day. Until it was solved, all the fighting from the Aisne to Béthény and on the Moronvilliers *massif* was irrelevant to the main issue. Even had









The Country between Soissons, Rheims, and Laon—the ground on which the main French attacks were made.



the Tanks succeeded, and the centre advanced a mile or two beyond Juvincourt, the strategical object would not have been gained. The Aisne heights would have remained a salient in the German front, and the French advance would have created a salient, and a very precarious salient, in the French line. The kernel of the problem was the Chemin des Dames, and it could not have been seriously believed that that mighty ridge would fall at once to the assault of 16th April. Yet the whole advance to Laon depended upon its immediate conquest. Only by a succession of miracles could Nivelle have succeeded, and miracles, when they happen in war, come singly and not in battalions. He fell into the error of endeavouring to reap the fruits of victory before beating the enemy. It was the error of a gifted and generous and most courageous spirit, but it was none the less an error. With Petain the French strategy returned to the patient, laborious, and deadly methods of the Somme.

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## CHAPTER CXXXVI.

### MESOPOTAMIA, SYRIA, AND THE BALKANS.

Position after the Capture of Bagdad—Retreat of the Turkish 13th Corps—Maude's next Objectives—The Turks break the Dams—British reach the Euphrates—Capture of Mushaidie—The Advance up the Diala—Maude at Shahraban—The Turkish Screen—Escape of the 13th Corps—The Turkish Counter-stroke on the Shatt-el-Adhaim—The British take Samarra—Position at End of April—Sir A. Murray reaches the Egyptian Frontier—Kress von Kressenstein—The British Problem—The Advance on Gaza—First Battle of Gaza—British retire behind the Wadi Ghuzze—The Second Battle of Gaza—Raid on the Beersheba-El Auja Railway—Sir Edmund Allenby succeeds Sir A. Murray—Results of the Gaza Actions—The Winter Fronts in the Balkans—The British Position—General Milne attacks at Lake Doiran—The Second Attack—Sarrai suspends Operations—Politics at Athens—M. Zaimis becomes Premier—Italy proclaims Albanian Protectorate—M. Jonnart arrives in Greece—Abdication of King Constantine—King Alexander's Proclamation—Allied Blockade raised—M. Zaimis resigns—M. Venizelos returns to Power.

**B**AGDAD had fallen to Sir Stanley Maude on the morning of 11th March. With it he won the southern terminus of the unfinished Bagdad railway, the first section of which had been completed as far north as Samarra. He *March 11.* won, too, the ganglion of all the routes of the Mesopotamian plain, where six telegraph lines and six good roads converged, and through which ran the historic highway to Persia that the armies

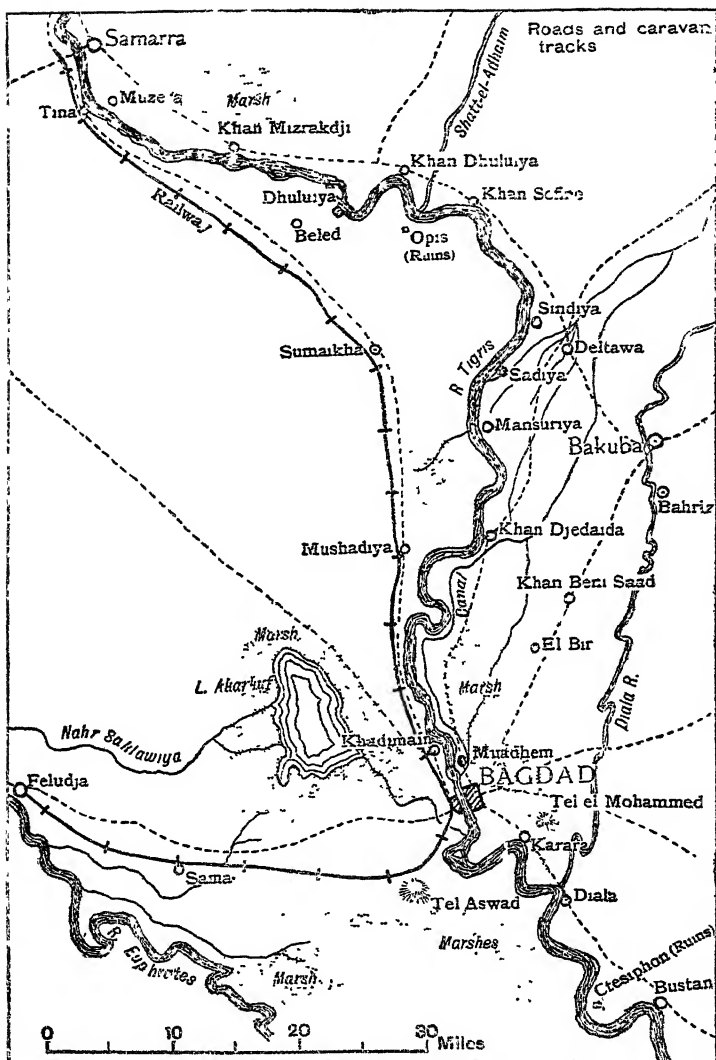
of Darius and Alexander and Harun-al-Rashid had travelled. This highway was now to play a part in the campaign. It ran north-east along the Diala to Khanikin, and then through the lateral valleys of the Median range climbed by Karind and Kermanshah to Hamadan on the Persian plateau. There lay Baratov's small Russian force of one infantry division and Cossack cavalry, which for a year had led a precarious existence some two hundred miles from its base at Kasvin. It will be remembered that in January 1916 Baratov had won Hamadan—the ancient Ecbatana—and, pushing westward, had occupied Kermanshah and Karind, and had sung his patrols into Khanikin itself, 120 miles from Bagdad. But the Turkish capture of Kut put an end to this bold adventure. The Turkish 13th Corps advanced up the Diala, and during the early summer of 1916 drove him back to the Persian tableland, and well to the east of Hamadan. There during the rest of the year he remained, shepherding his difficult transport as well as he might, unable to advance and equally unable to retire, for the air of Persia was not salubrious for Baratov's handful, if once it had to retreat before the Turk. The enemy had posts in the northern mountains at Senna and elsewhere, and since he was secure on the Tigris he could at any moment launch a force for Baratov's destruction.

Sir Stanley Maude's advance in the beginning of 1917 changed the situation. As soon as he had entered Kut on 24th February the Turkish 13th Corps fell back from Hamadan. They did not attempt to hold the pass of Said Abad in the main Median range, and by the time Bagdad fell they

were in Kermanshah, and Baratov's Cossacks were at Bisitun, some twenty miles to the east, where the great rock-sculptures of Darius frown from the mountain side. The reason of this retreat was not far to seek. If Maude, pushing up the Diala, could reach Khanikin first, he would cut off the retreat of the 13th Corps. The Senna detachment was hastening to Kermanshah, and the whole Turkish force was striving against time for Khanikin. It was such a race as was rarely seen in the stagnant modern war of positions.

The conquerors of Bagdad, therefore, could not rest on their laurels. Maude had two tasks before him which would not wait. One was to get to Khanikin before the enemy; the second was to harass the retreating 18th Corps in front of him, to prevent it cutting certain important dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, and to drive it north beyond the rail-head at Samarra. He had also to make his left flank secure by seizing Feluja, the nearest point on the Euphrates to Bagdad, and so cut the enemy's communications between the upper and the lower river. He therefore divided his forces into four columns. One advanced on each bank of the Tigris, a third struck westward towards Feluja on the Euphrates, forty miles distant, and the fourth followed the Persian road up the Diala valley.

The two lesser tasks were quickly accomplished. The Turks cut the dam above Bagdad as soon as we had entered the city, and the river waters burst into the Akkar Kuf Lake, which overflowed and swamped all the ground up to the *bund* which protected the railway and the western suburbs. But the *bund* held firm, and since the Tigris was excep-



Bagdad and the country to the north as far as Samarra (showing the completed southern section of the Bagdad Railway and the branch line to the Euphrates).



tionally low there was no serious hindrance to our operations. The Euphrates column entered Feluja March 19. on 19th March, just too late to cut off the garrisons of the middle valley on their northward retreat. It harassed their rear-guards, and drove them twenty-five miles upstream to their prepared position at Ramadie.

On the same date Sir Stanley Maude issued a proclamation to the Bagdad *vilayet*, which must rank high among the many proclamations issued by British generals to Eastern peoples :—

“ 1. In the name of my King, and in the name of the peoples over whom he rules, I address you as follows :—

“ 2. Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy, and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task, I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions in which British troops operate ; but our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.

“ 3. Since the days of Halaka your city and your lands have been subject to the tyranny of strangers, your palaces have fallen into ruins, your gardens have sunk in desolation, and your forefathers and yourselves have groaned in bondage. Your sons have been carried off to wars not of your seeking, your wealth has been stripped from you by unjust men and squandered in distant places.

“ 4. Since the days of Midhat, the Turks have talked of reforms, yet do not the ruins and wastes of to-day testify the vanity of those promises ?

“ 5. It is the wish not only of my King and his peoples, but it is also the wish of the great nations with whom he is in alliance, that you should prosper even as in the past, when your lands were fertile, when your ancestors gave to the world literature, science, and art, and when Baghdad city was one of the wonders of the world.

“ 6. Between your people and the dominions of my King there has been a close bond of interest. For two hundred years have the merchants of Baghdad and Great Britain traded together in mutual profit and friendship. On the

other hand, the Germans and Turks, who have despoiled you and yours, have for twenty years made Baghdad a centre of power from which to assail the power of the British and the Allies of the British in Persia and Arabia. Therefore the British Government cannot remain indifferent as to what takes place in your country now or in the future, for in duty to the interests of the British people and their Allies, the British Government cannot risk that being done in Baghdad again which has been done by the Turks and Germans during the war.

"7. But you people of Baghdad, whose commercial prosperity and whose safety from oppression and invasion must ever be a matter of the closest concern to the British Government, are not to understand that it is the wish of the British Government to impose upon you alien institutions. It is the hope of the British Government that the aspirations of your philosophers and writers shall be realized, and that once again the people of Baghdad shall flourish, enjoying their wealth and substance under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws and their racial ideals. In Hedjaz the Arabs have expelled the Turks and Germans who oppressed them and proclaimed the Sherif Hussein as their King, and his Lordship rules in independence and freedom, and is the ally of the nations who are fighting against the power of Turkey and Germany; so, indeed, are the noble Arabs, the Lords of Koweyt, Nejd, and Asir.

"8. Many noble Arabs have perished in the cause of Arab freedom, at the hands of those alien rulers, the Turks, who oppressed them. It is the determination of the Government of Great Britain and the great Powers allied to Great Britain that these noble Arabs shall not have suffered in vain. It is the hope and desire of the British people and the nations in alliance with them that the Arab race may rise once more to greatness and renown among the peoples of the earth, and that it shall bind itself together to this end in unity and concord.

"9. O people of Baghdad remember that for twenty-six generations you have suffered under strange tyrants who have ever endeavoured to set one Arab house against another in order that they might profit by your dissensions. This policy is abhorrent to Great Britain and her Allies, for there can be neither peace nor prosperity where there is

enrury and misgovernment. Therefore I am commanded to invite you, through your nobles and elders and representatives, to participate in the management of your civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of Great Britain who accompany the British Army, so that you may be united with your kinsmen in North, East, South, and West in realizing the aspirations of your race."

On the 13th the western Tigris column moved out of Bagdad, and on the 14th, in scorching weather, and after stubborn fighting in which certain Highland battalions greatly distinguished themselves, took the ridge called the Sugar Loaf Hill and the station of Mushaidie, and cleared the right bank of the river up to that point. The fighting lasted into the early morning of the 15th, by which time the remnants of the three enemy divisions were in full retreat towards Samarra. By the morning of the 16th they were some forty miles north of Bagdad.\*

But the advance on the western bank could not be pressed so long as the eastern bank remained uncleared, for the other divisions of the 18th Corps were concentrating there, and a fresh division had arrived from Mosul. For the moment, however, the main interest lay in the race against time with the Turkish 13th Corps in the mountains. On the 15th Maude's eastern column left Bagdad, and on the night of the 17th crossed the Diale, which in its upper valley bends westward towards the Tigris, and took the villages of Bahriz and Bakuba. Bahriz was the western end of a difficult mountain path from Harunabad, on the Persian trunk road, by Mendeli, and our posi-

\* A vivid description of this action was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* for August 1917.

tion there prevented its use by the retreating 13th Corps. By this time Baratov was in Kermanshah, and the Senna force was cut off from its normal line of retreat, and compelled to attempt the tracks of the mountain between it and the Upper Diala, leaving its guns behind it.

The situation seemed a desperate one, but the Turkish commander revealed true qualities of leadership and strategy. West of Karind lies the pass of Piatak, on the ridge which separates the streams which flow to the Karun basin from the Alwand torrent which joins the Diala. There, in an admirable position for defence, he left a strong rear-guard, which succeeded in checking Baratov's weak forces. Against the British Khalil took up a position on the ridge called Jebel Hamrin, which cuts the Diala at right angles near Mansuriya, some thirty miles north-east of Bakuba. These two screens were intended to hold up the pursuit until the 13th Corps reached Khanikin, crossed the Diala near the mouth of the Alwand, and took the road which runs by Kara Tepe, Kifri, and Kirkuk, towards Mosul.

On 23rd March Maude was in Shahraban, and close on the Jebel Hamrin position. His advance had been slow and difficult owing to the number of canals and little rivers that had to be bridged. *March 23.* Seventy miles off was Baratov, struggling in snowdrifts against the Piatak Pass, while the British were sweltering in the torrid plains. Between the two was the Turkish 13th Corps, rapidly approaching the Diala and safety. On the 25th Maude attacked the screen at Jebel Hamrin, his right moving along the highway *March 25.* towards Kizil Robat, and the cavalry on the left

attacking the defile of Deli Abbas on the right bank of the Diala. Meantime the column operating on the eastern bank of the Tigris had occupied Del-tawa and Sindia, thirty-five miles north of Bagdad, where the Diala and Tigris are only nine miles apart. There they were facing the larger part of the 18th Corps.

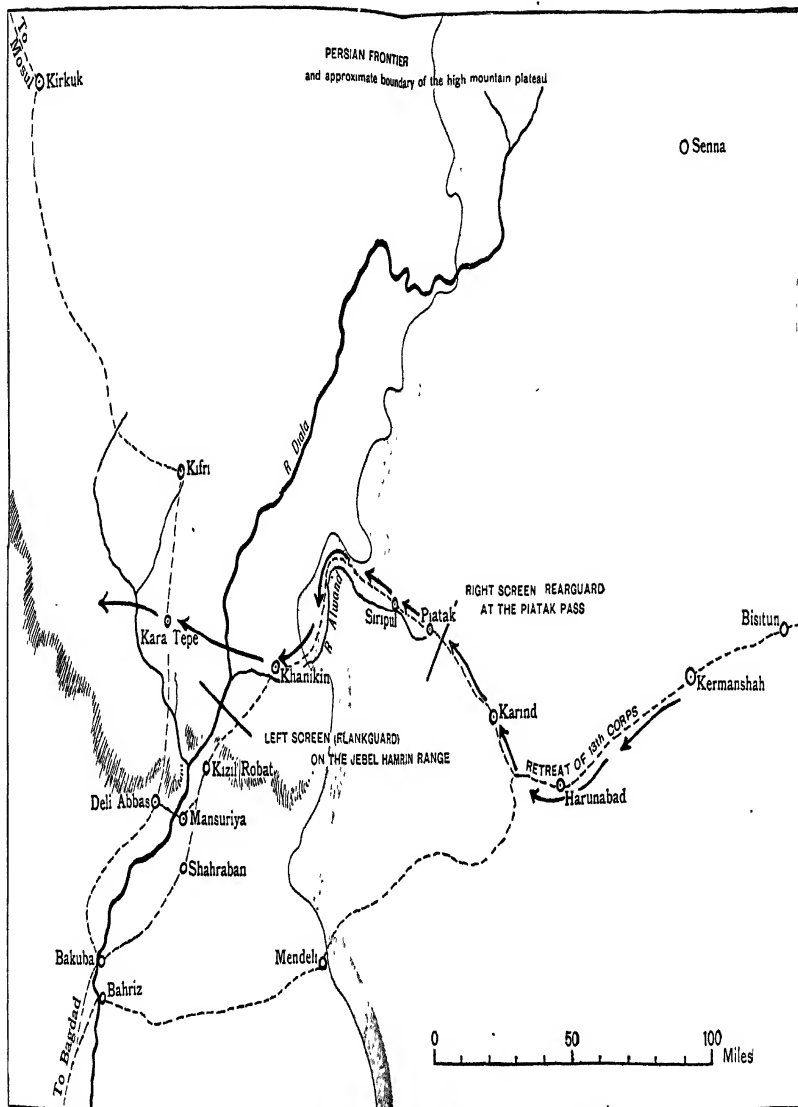
By the last days of March the Turkish 13th Corps had escaped from the trap. On the 31st *March 31.* Maude carried the Deli Abbas position, and on the same day Baratov was over the Piatak Pass, and some ten miles farther west at Siripul. The screens were being withdrawn, for there was no further need of them. When we passed beyond the barrier of the Jebel Hamrin hills we could see on the far side of the Diala the last Turkish rearguards moving on the western plain by Kara Tepe. The enemy had carried out his plan with complete precision and success, and his opponents were not slow to acclaim his achievement.

On the 29th the eastern Tigris column had forced the 18th Corps back and crossed the marshy *March 29.* channel of the river Adhaim. We were now on the left bank of the Tigris, within thirty miles of Samarra, on the very ground where Julian the Apostate had received his death-wound. But the situation had changed. The 18th and 13th Corps were now united, and able to take the offensive. Baratov was in Khanikin, and on

*April 2.* 2nd April his Cossack advance guards joined hands with the British at Kizil Robat. About

*April 7.* 7th April the Turkish counter-offensive developed. The 13th Corps, instead of making for Kifri, swung south, held the left bank of





Retreat of the Turkish 13th Army Corps from Persia.



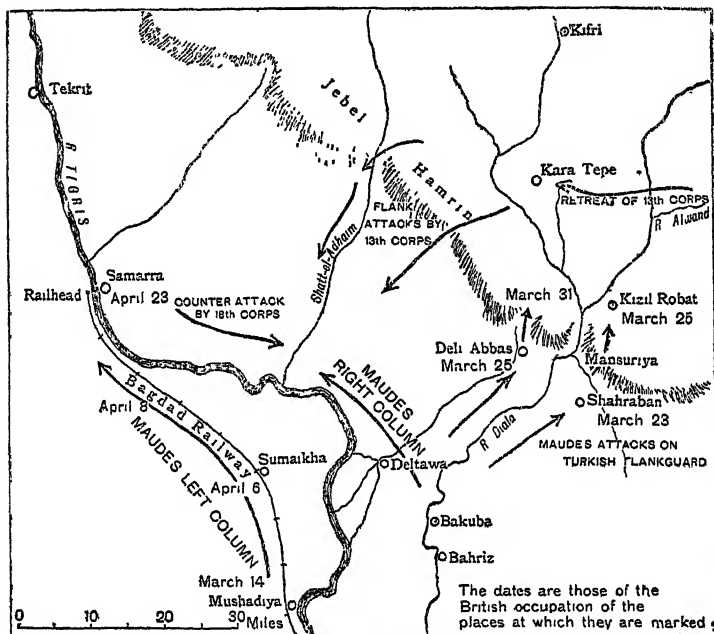




the Shatt-el-Adhaim, in conjunction with the 52nd Division of the 18th Corps, and came in touch with the British cavalry on the line Garfa-Deli Abbas. Maude promptly retired his advanced posts on the right bank of the Diala, and fell slowly southwards towards Deltawa, while his cavalry held the enemy. On the night of 10th April the eastern Tigris column marched eastward, and *April 10-11.* on the morning of the 11th had taken the Turks in flank. The battle began in a mirage which, while it lasted, made air reconnaissance impossible. It lifted towards midday, and before evening the enemy were in retreat, leaving behind them 700 wounded prisoners. The fighting lasted till the 13th, by which date *April 13.* the 13th Corps was forced back again on the Jebel Hamrin range.

Meantime the western Tigris column had been making good progress along the railway. On the 6th they were at Sumaikha; on the 8th they had taken Beled station; on the 9th they were in Harbe; on the 16th they captured the El Kaibn ridge, in front of the Turkish position which covered Istabulat station. The time had now come for the final advance on Samarra. On the night of the 17th Maude's right wing re-crossed the Shatt-el-Adhaim. Next day it engaged and destroyed the Turkish forces which held the right bank of the stream. The action was *April 17.* fought on a day of intense heat, and at a cost of seventy-three casualties we took over *April 18.* 1,200 prisoners, including twenty-seven *April 21.* officers. On the 21st the left wing attacked

Istabulat, and drove in the enemy. Pressing on, *April 22.* they came in touch on the 22nd with the final Turkish position, some six miles nearer Samarra. By daylight on the 23rd the



Sketch Map to illustrate General Maude's operations north of Bagdad.

line was carried, and that morning we took Samarra station, capturing sixteen locomotives, *April 23.* 240 railway trucks, and two barges laden with munitions. Next day we entered Samarra town. In the operations of the preceding three days we had taken some 700 prisoners, five guns, and large quantities of rifles.

Khalil made one last attempt at a counterstroke. The two British columns on the Tigris had now joined hands, and the 18th Corps was scattered some fifteen miles north of Samarra, where it was feverishly entrenching. But the 13th Corps still hung on our right flank, and on 24th April *April 24.* it emerged from the Jebel Hamrin hills. That day it was well beaten, and driven up the Shatt-el-Adhaim. We struck again on the 30th against the position which it held *April 30.* twenty-five miles south-west of Kifri, at the defile where the Adhaim issues from the hills. The attack, delivered in a furious dust-storm, was a surprise, and carried all the enemy lines of entrenchments. Once more he was forced to flee, with our cavalry at his heels.

The end of April found Bagdad secure. The 13th Corps, after its brilliant escape from Kerman-shah, had been three times engaged and beaten, and was now forced into the Jebel Hamrin fastnesses. The 18th Corps had fallen back on Tekrit, having been five times defeated during the month of April alone. In every direction the enemy had been pushed at least eighty miles from the city; moreover, his two corps had been driven back on divergent lines. The terminal section of the Bagdad railway was in our hands. Our casualties had been slight, and our transport and hospital arrangements were now so good that the Army of Mesopotamia, once the worst cared for of British forces, was now almost the best. Sir Stanley Maude, now that the summer heat was upon him, could call a halt, with an easy mind. The original plan of operations for the spring of 1917 had given the *beau rôle* to the

Russians—an advance from Persia upon Mosul and Bagdad. The disorganization of revolutionary Russia had made the great projected westward and southward drive impossible. The heavy end had, therefore, fallen upon the British commander, and he had performed his task with consummate judgment and skill. He had blocked the communications of the enemy with Southern Persia, and, therefore, with the Indian border.

The fall of Rafa on 9th January had brought Sir Archibald Murray to the eastern borders of Egypt. The desert railway was being  
*Jan. 9.* pushed along the coast to form a British line of communication similar to that which the Turks possessed in their military railway from Beersheba. At first it was thought that the Turks would make their next stand close to the frontier.

*Feb. 28.* On 28th February our mounted patrols took the village of Khan Yunus, and preparations were made for an attack in force upon the Weli Shaikh Nuran position, at which the enemy had been working hard since Christmas. But on

*March 5.* 5th March our aircraft reported that the two enemy divisions in front of us were falling back. A vigorous pursuit was impossible, for our railhead was still too far in the rear, and the enemy unhindered took up ground on the line from Gaza to Tel el Sheria, with Beersheba as an advanced post on his left.

The German general, Kress von Kressenstein, now in actual command of the Turkish forces, was a brave and competent soldier, who had to contend with immense difficulties. The people of Turkey

were heartily sick of the war. Starvation and pestilence had raged throughout the land, and Syria had not suffered the least. The Lebanon and even Damascus were depopulated by famine. Supplies of all kinds for the troops were hopelessly in arrear. Men came unwillingly to arms, and desertion became an epidemic. One division which left Constantinople at full strength lost 3,000 deserters on the road. A regiment reached Mesopotamia with the loss of 500 deserters out of a total of 1,300 men. In the previous October, out of 2,000 sent in reinforcements from Constantinople to Aleppo only 966 arrived at their destination. In such conditions it was hard to make a plan of campaign. Above all, he had above him, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Syria, Djemal, nominally Minister of Marine, whose moods were as shifting as the desert sands. Djemal had quarrelled with all his colleagues of the Committee, he had quarrelled furiously with von Kressenstein, and only his fanatical hatred of Britain kept him from exchanging his uneasy Syrian satrapy for the more congenial paths of intrigue at Constantinople.

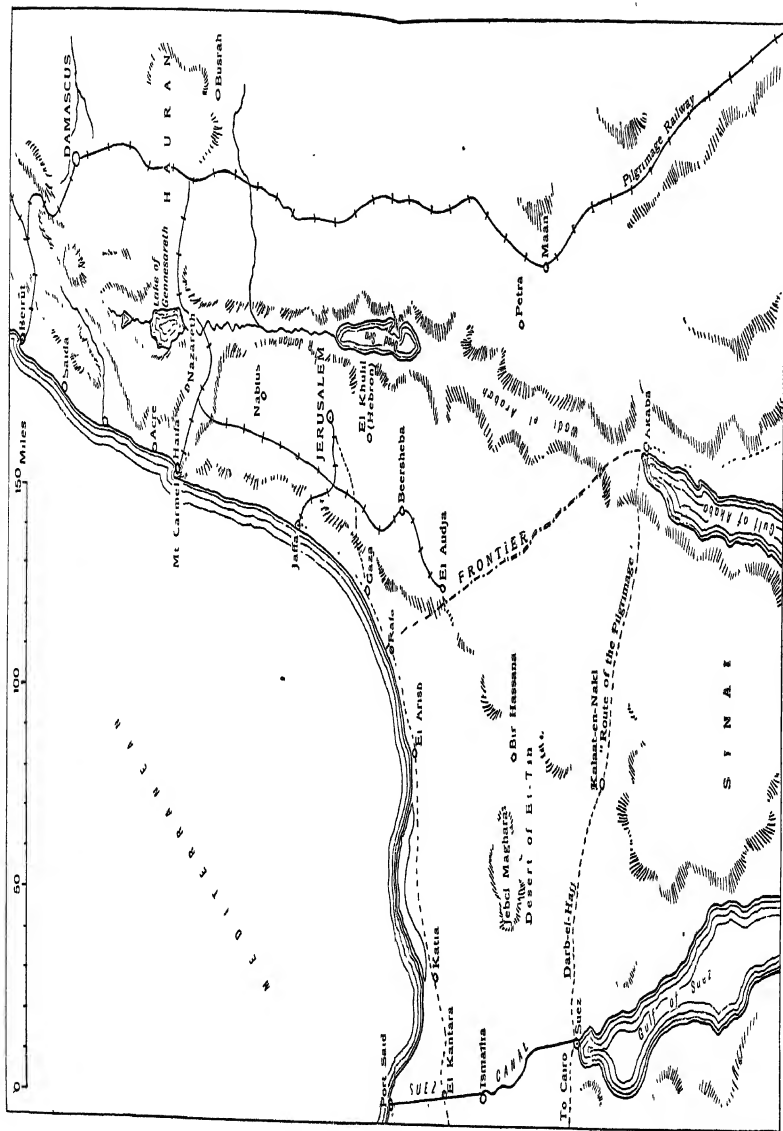
The land from the Wadi el Arish—the ancient “River of Egypt”—to the Philistian plain had for twenty-six hundred years been a cockpit of war. Sometimes a conqueror from the north like Nebuchadnezzar, or from the south like Ali Bey, Napoleon, and Mehemet Ali, met the enemy in Egypt or Syria, but more often the decisive fight was fought in the gates. Ascalon, Gaza, Rafa, El Arish, are all names famous in history. Up and down the strip of seaward levels marched the great armies of Egypt and Assyria, while the Jews looked fearfully on from

their barren hills. In the Philistian plain Sennacherib smote the Egyptian hosts in the days of King Hezekiah, only to see his army melt away under the stroke of the "angel of the Lord." At Rafa Esarhaddon defeated Pharaoh, and added Egypt and Ethiopia to his kingdoms. There, too, the Scythian hordes were bought off with blackmail by Psammetichus. At Megiddo, or Armageddon, Josiah was vanquished by Pharaoh Necho, who in turn was routed by Nebuchadnezzar. The first Ptolemy was beaten at Gaza by the young Demetrius, and a century later Ptolemy the Fourth shattered the Seleucid army at Rafa. Twenty years after came the famous siege of Gaza by Antiochus the Third. Then the land had rest till, in 614 A.D., the last great Sasanid, Chosroes II., swept down upon Egypt. In 1072 the invasion of the Seljuk Turcomans was stayed in Philistia. Godfrey of Bouillon, the Crusading king of Jerusalem, defeated the Egyptians at Ascalon, and a century and a half later that town, long a Frankish stronghold, fell to the Mameluke Sultan after the Battle of Gaza. In this gate of ancient feuds it now fell to Turkey's lot to speak with her enemy.

It was clear that Sir Archibald Murray must fight a pitched battle before he could advance. He had now left the Sinai desert for the stony hills of Judah, which lie between the south of the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, and rise in the north-east corner to the noble mass of Hebron. In front of the enemy's position ran in a broad curve from south-east to north-west the dry watercourse called the Wadi Ghuzze. It was desirable to engage him as soon as possible, lest he should fall back upon







Palestine and Southern Syria and the Sinai Desert.





more favourable lines farther north. Our railhead was still far behind, for it only reached Rafa in the middle of March; and if a blow was to be struck soon it would be necessary to push forward the British force "to its full radius of action into a country bare of all supplies and almost devoid of water." There were two possible plans of campaign. One was to strike at Beersheba, and so reach the Central Palestine railway. The drawback of such a course was that it would have brought the British line of communication from Rafa parallel to the enemy's front, and given him an easy target for a counterstroke. The other and safer plan was to move up the coast with Gaza as the objective, aiming at the Turkish right flank. Such an advance would have its left covered by the sea, it would be better supplied with water, and the railway following it would be easier to build among the flats of the Philistian plain than among the rocks and ridges of the Judæan hills. Sir Archibald Murray accordingly decided upon the latter course. On 20th March Sir Charles Dobell, commanding the Eastern force, moved his headquarters from El Arish to Rafa, and Sir Philip Chetwode, commanding the Desert Column,\* joined him there. Chetwode's cavalry was now at the little village of Deir el Belah, south-west of the Wadi Ghuzze, and the 52nd and 54th Infantry Divisions and the Camel Corps were disposed on its right

\* The Desert Column (Chetwode) comprised at this time the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division (Major-General Chauvel), the Imperial Mounted Division (Major-General Hodgson), and the 53rd Infantry Division (Major-General Dallas).

south of the watercourse. By the evening of the *March* 25. 25th all was in train for the coming battle. The sun set in a sky of rose and gold, and there was a wonderful night of stars, but those familiar with that coast sniffed in the air the coming of a sea fog.

The British plan of battle was this. The enemy's front was not a continuous line of trenches. Most of the troops were well to the north-east of Gaza, but he had a considerable garrison in that town, and posts echeloned to the south-east as far as Beersheba. The cavalry of the Desert Column were to advance early in the morning and occupy the country east and north of the town to prevent Turkish reinforcements arriving from that quarter and to cut off the enemy's retreat. The 53rd Division of the Desert Column was to follow the cavalry for a little, and then to attack Gaza in front. The 54th Division was to move on their right rear and hold the Sheikh Abbas height, in case of an attack from the east or south-east. One brigade of this division was to assemble a little to the westward to be ready at short notice to support the Desert Column. The 52nd Division was held in general reserve. Sir Archibald Murray's objects were these : to seize the line of the Wadi Ghuzze, and so cover the advance of the railway ; to compel the enemy to fight ; and by a surprise stroke to capture Gaza and cut off its garrison. The main intention, it is clear, was less the occupation of the town than the capture of the 7,000 Turks who held it. It was in essence a raid on the largest possible scale. Consequently it was an operation in which time was all-important.

The cavalry scrambled down the forty-foot sides of the Wadi Ghuzze, and ploughed through its sandy bottom at 2.30 a.m., while the night was yet dark. But no sooner had the sun risen than a dense sea fog rolled over the countryside. No landmark was visible, and the troops had to grope their way forward by compass-bearing. This delay was the crucial event of the day, for it upset the time-table of operations, and deprived what was a race against time—for there was no water—of two priceless hours of daylight. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division in front, having crossed the Wadi by 6.15 a.m. rode for Beit Durdis, due east of Gaza, which it reached at 9.30. The Imperial Mounted Division at the same hour arrived at El Mendur. Presently the former division, pushing out detachments from Beit Durdis, had completely outflanked Gaza on the north and east, and rested its right on the sea. The 2nd Australian Light Horse took prisoner the general commanding the 53rd Turkish Division, and destroyed with machine-gun fire the head of a Turkish column debouching from Gaza towards the north-east. The Imperial Mounted Division sent out patrols towards Huj and Hereira and the railway at Tel el Sheria, two squadrons of a Yeomanry brigade were astride the Beersheba-Gaza road, and a squadron attempted to gain touch with the Australian and New Zealand Division. This mounted screen was all day heavily engaged, for it had to contend with the enemy reinforcements arriving from north, east, and south-east, and was under the fire of the heavy guns at Hereira.

Meantime the 53rd Division—Territorials from

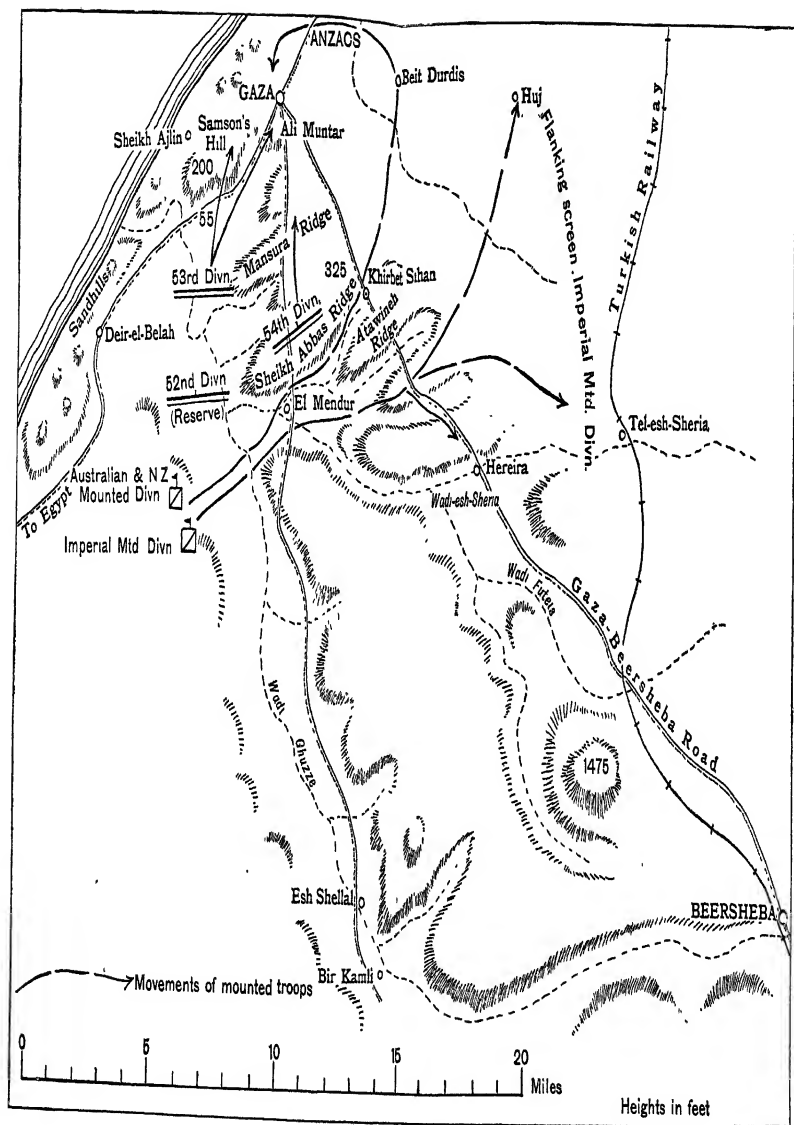
the eastern counties of England—had crossed the Wadi Ghuzze for the frontal attack. Their right was directed on the Mansura Ridge and their left on El Sheluf, while the Gloucestershire Hussars protected their flank towards the sea. These positions were reached by 10 a.m., the guns had been brought up, and the artillery "preparation" begun. The fog had gone by eight o'clock, and the British infantry on the ridge could look across the two miles of yellow sand dunes to the white red-roofed houses of the little town, the green of its lemon groves, and the minarets of the mosque which was once the Templars' Church of St. John. On the right in front of them was the hillock called Ali Muntar, up which Samson carried the gate of Gaza. Beyond were the ridges and open spaces where the cavalry were now engaged, and from the far base of the Judæan hills rose the dust clouds which told of Turkish troops hurrying to the battleground. The 54th division—Welsh Territorials under Major-General Hare—were instructed to protect the right rear of the 53rd against this threatened assault. They took up positions duly on the Sheikh Abbas Ridge, five miles S.S.E. of the town. One brigade from this division went to Mansura to support the attacking troops.

The 53rd, deployed on the line El Sheluf-Mansura, advanced against the Ali Muntar position. This was a perfect honeycomb of trenches, and so was the hill to the north-east separated from it by a low saddle of sand-dunes. The three brigades went into action about noon, over ground devoid of cover and under the hot sun of a Syrian spring. At one o'clock they were close on their objectives, but the









First Battle of Gaza.



Turkish shrapnel and machine-gun fire were woefully thinning their ranks.

At that hour Sir Philip Chetwode resolved to fling the whole of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division against the town itself to support the attack of the 53rd, and to bring the Imperial Mounted Division and the cavalry farther north to act as a screen against those enemy reinforcements from the railway, which were now observed to be coming up fast. By 3.30 General Chauvel was ready to attack, the 2nd Australian Horse on the north, with its right flank on the sea, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles in the centre, and the Yeomanry on the left, adjoining the main infantry battle.

By 4.30 the 53rd Division had carried most of Ali Muntar, and was closing in on Gaza from the south, while the Australasian horsemen were in the eastern streets. At this moment General Hare brought up a brigade of the 54th Division, which had been placed at his disposal, with orders to take the remnant of the position. The Welshmen after a gallant struggle succeeded, and pushed on nearly a mile beyond the crest. Meantime the Australasians were fighting their way through the cactus hedges on the skirts of Gaza, and the 3rd Australian Light Horse were fending off enemy attacks to the east. In that direction the enemy was held, and in another hour the town would have been in our hands. But the sea-fog had done its work, and the morning's delay had ruined our chances of success. For the darkness descended before we had won the last ground, and in war a task unfinished is like a task not begun.

The British position was far from satisfactory.

To quote Sir Archibald Murray's words : " Gaza was enveloped, and the enemy, in addition to heavy losses in killed and wounded, had lost 700 prisoners. The 53rd Division was occupying the Ali Muntar position, which it had captured, but its right flank was very much in the air, only a thin line of cavalry holding off the relief columns of continually increasing strength which were approaching from north and east. In support of this division the 54th Division, less one brigade, was holding Sheikh Abbas, with its left about two and a half miles from the flank of the 53rd. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division were very much extended round Gaza, and were engaged in street fighting. The Imperial Mounted Division and the Imperial Camel Corps, on a very wide front, were endeavouring to hold off enemy forces." It was a fantastic situation in which General Dobell's army now found itself, and it was made perilous by the approach of strong enemy reinforcements from north, east, and south-east. Moreover the mounted troops had been unable to water their horses during the day, and unless Gaza was taken there was no water on that side the Wadi Ghuzze.

General Dobell had still the 52nd Division in reserve, which he might have used to support the 53rd, and enable it to join up with the 54th. But the night was falling, and it seemed to him, probably with justice, too wild a gambler's throw. He accordingly resolved to withdraw. Chauvel was ordered to break off the engagement and retire his two mounted divisions west of the Wadi Ghuzze. This would make the position of the 53rd Division impossible, so Hare was instructed to draw in his

right, and bring it into touch with the 54th Division, now falling back from Sheikh Abbas to a ridge south-west of Mansura. The retirement, considering the difficulties, was brilliantly accomplished, though some of the Australian Light Horse, coming round the east side of Gaza, had a sharp brush with the enemy. The New Zealanders managed to bring back with them a battery of enemy guns which they had taken earlier in the day. The strangest adventure was that of two light armoured motor batteries, which had been engaged in the direction of Huj. A correspondent has told of their doings:—

“When it became dark the cars retired, with an officer walking in front to find a practicable path over much broken country. They proceeded at a walking pace for four hours, when the crews were given sleep till four o'clock in the morning. Then they made ready to proceed to our lines through a waterless country. An officer went ahead in an unarmoured car to reconnoitre, and saw at once that he was confronted with a large body of the enemy. The outposts, only a hundred yards ahead, immediately opened fire. He abandoned the staff car, and ran to the armoured cars and ordered an attack. It proved to be an amazing fight of eight cars against 5,000 infantry and artillery. The cars pushed forward, having to find paths over rough ground full of deep holes. The enemy tried with all their might to stop the armoured cars, but the latter fought, sometimes in line, sometimes in column, and mowed down the Turks at ranges of between 25 and 300 yards, and got through the whole of the 5,000 Turks in two hours, with one killed and four wounded, inflicting at a conservative estimate 350 casualties.”

At daybreak on the morning of the 27th the British line north of the Wadi Ghuzze ran in a sharp salient along the El Sire and El Burjalije Ridges—the 53rd Division on the left and the 54th on the right, with the Gloucesters *March 27.*

tershire Hussars guarding the left flank next the sea, and the Camel Corps between the right flank and the wadi. Meantime the enemy had taken advantage of our withdrawal to reinforce strongly the Gaza garrison. The chance of a British advance had gone, but nevertheless patrols from two brigades pushed forward and occupied our positions of the day before on Ali Muntar Hill. Supports were about to be sent forward to these outposts, when von Kressenstein launched his counter-attack from the north and north-east. It drove in at once our patrols from Ali Muntar, and was then checked by our artillery barrage. But it was necessary to withdraw the apex of the salient, which was the point of junction of our two infantry divisions. Meantime another Turkish force had reached the Sheikh Abbas Ridge, and shelled our rear south of Mansura. The 53rd and 54th Divisions clung gallantly all day to their ground, and the Camel Corps on their right repelled with great slaughter an attack by the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division. But our situation was a bad one, exposed and waterless, and, since we were far from railhead and the horses were tired, a rapid reorganization for a new advance was out of the question. General Dobell, therefore, ordered a retirement, and during the night the infantry and cavalry joined the mounted troops on the other side of Wadi Ghuzze, where they took up a strong position covering Deir el Belah.

Of the three contemplated objectives two had more or less been gained. We dominated the line of the Wadi Ghuzze, and thereby covered the farther progress of the railway, which was now reaching Khan Yunus. We had forced the enemy to give

battle. We had taken 950 Turkish and German prisoners and two Austrian field guns, and—at the expense of under 4,000 casualties, most of them only slightly wounded—had caused some 8,000 enemy losses. But we had wholly failed to take Gaza, and this may fairly be attributed to the fog and the consequent delay, and not to any blunder in the plan or lack of resolution in the troops. “The troops engaged,” said the official despatch, “both cavalry, camelry, and infantry, especially the 53rd Division and the brigade of the 54th, which had not been seriously in action since the evacuation of Suvla Bay at the end of 1915, fought with the utmost gallantry and endurance, and showed to the full the splendid fighting qualities which they possess.”

Three weeks intervened between the first and second battles of Gaza. In the meantime the railway had been brought forward to Deir el Belah, and cisterns had been fixed in the Wadi Ghuzze, to which water brought by rail was pumped over the In Seirat range. The Gaza position was now very different from what it had been on the 26th of March. Then the long straggling line of posts from Gaza to Beersheba had been held by two Turkish divisions; now we had five infantry divisions against us, at least a division of cavalry, and twice the number of heavy batteries. The inner defences of the town—the Ali Muntar Ridge—had been enormously strengthened. There was a strong line of outer defences from the sea to Sheikh Abbas, and on the eastern flank a new trench system 12,000 yards long had been constructed from Gaza south-east to the Atawineh Ridge. An immense amount



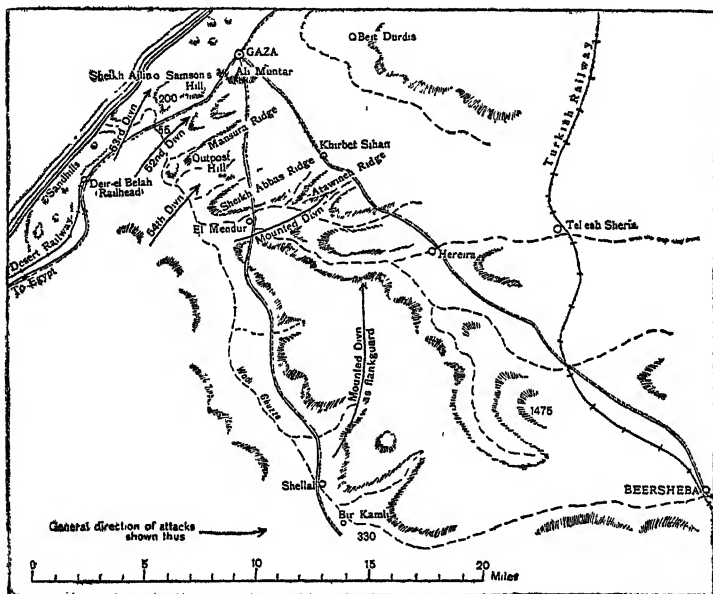
of wiring had been done, and the change in the situation was roughly the change in the Gallipoli position between the first and second battles of Krithia. There was no longer any possibility of a surprise. There was no chance, owing to the flank defences, of an encircling movement by the cavalry. The only tactics were those of a frontal assault, and it may be asked why Sir Archibald Murray, without superior numbers, and with all the disadvantages of his lengthy communications, was willing to risk the battle. We had learned from bitter experience at the Dardanelles how formidable the Turk was in a straightforward defensive fight. The answer seems to be that it was considered desirable on political grounds to make some advance in Palestine to synchronize with the great French and British offensives on the Western front, and that he believed that the enemy, shaken by the action of 26th-27th March, would yield to the cumulative pressure of a second blow. The alternative plan of turning Gaza by way of Beersheba was impossible at the moment, since all the British preparations had been directed towards the coast route. In such desert warfare, where the mobility of troops is limited by the position of railhead, it is impossible in a week or two to change a strategical plan.

The British scheme was a frontal attack in two stages. The first stage was designed to carry the outer defences from the sea to Sheikh Abbas, and the second to break through the Ali Muntar position and take Gaza. In the first stage the dispositions were these. On the left the 53rd Division, now commanded by Major-General Mott, was to

stand north of the Wadi Ghuzze and carry out strong reconnaissances along the coast. On its right the 52nd Division, under Major-General W. E. B. Smith, was to advance against the ridge running south-westward from Ali Muntar, which contained the formidable defences known as the Warren, the Labyrinth, Green Hill, Middlesex Hill, Outpost Hill, and Lees Hill. On its right the 54th Division was to attack the line Mansura-Sheikh Abbas. Its right flank was protected by a mounted division of the Desert Column, while the other mounted division was placed at Shellal, to watch enemy movements in the direction of Hereira. The 74th Division—Territorials who had been stationed in India during the first eighteen months of the war—were in general reserve. The country, it should be remembered, was notably adapted for defence—sand-dunes, criss-cross ridges, and endless natural redoubts for machine guns.

The attack began at dawn on 17th April under a sky which promised a day of burning sun. The first stage was a brilliant success. With the assistance of Tanks the outer defence line—Sheikh Abbas-Mansura-Kurd Hill—was taken by 7 a.m. with few casualties. The cavalry on the right did good service, and dislodged bodies of Turkish horse from pockets of the nullahs between El Mendur and Hereira. During the 18th the ground won was secured, and preparations were completed for the final effort on the 19th. It was now the duty of the 53rd Division to push north along the shore against the half-moon of trenches south-west of Gaza, its first objective being the line Sheikh Ajlin-Samson Ridge. The

52nd Division were to carry the long ridge running south-east from Ali Muntar. The 54th Division were directed against Ali Muntar itself and the enemy's position at Khirbet Sihan, with the Camel Corps to help it. The 74th Division were to be held in readiness behind the Sheikh Abbas and



The Second Battle of Gaza.

Mansura Ridges. The Imperial Mounted Division were to attack El Atawineh dismounted, and the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division to protect their right. The task of the Desert Column was strictly a "containing" attack, the struggle for the main objectives being left to the 52nd and 54th Divisions.

The cavalry started at dawn, and so far as the mounted part was concerned, succeeded in gaining its objectives. The dismounted Imperial Division found themselves held, *April 19.* however, by the Atawineh trenches. The "preparation" for the infantry began at 5.30 a.m., and was assisted from the sea by the guns of the French man-of-war *Requin* and two British monitors. In the hot, windless dawn the bombardment was a strange spectacle. "As the sun lifted over the black hills of Judæa from sea and land shells of all calibres up to 11-inch tore slits in the elaborate defences, throwing up masses of earth and wire, and making Ali Muntar quake. Some trees on that hill were entirely denuded of their leaves, but the most prominent tree of all seemed to bend before the shell-storm and retain most of its clothing. . . . On the dunes pillars of sand were raised, framed with the white and black smoke of the explosives, a wonderful foil to the glittering golden ridges."

The 53rd Division attacked at 7.15, and the rest of the line at 7.30. The 53rd took Samson Ridge, and early in the afternoon attained its first objective. The 52nd—Territorials from the Scottish Lowlands, who had won fame at Gallipoli and in the earlier Sinai campaign—had a harder task. They were attacking the strong ridge running south-west from Ali Muntar, and though they took Lees Hill, its first point, by 8.15 a.m., they were checked on its second feature, Outpost Hill. The 54th could make little headway against Ali Muntar, owing to the fact that its left was in the air, but its right brigade and the camelry managed to enter the enemy trenches at Khirbet Sihan. In the after-

noon a heavy counter-attack forced the whole division a little back, as well as the 3rd and 4th Australian Light Horse on its right; but the attack was stayed by the gallantry and stamina of the Camel Corps, who held a critical point till a Yeomanry Brigade came up in support. In the same way the 52nd Division was forced off Outpost Hill, but Major W. T. Forrest of the K.O.S.B., who fell a little later, with a handful of men retook the place. But the Lowlanders found themselves unable to advance farther, and unless they could advance the left of the 54th Division would be seriously enfiladed. The difficulty was that the configuration of the ground made it hard to send reinforcements to the 52nd, since the attack in that section must be made on a very narrow front. At 6.20 in the evening we were forced off Outpost Hill, and the position at nightfall was that, while the 53rd Division held the line Sheikh Ajlin-Samson Ridge, the 52nd and 54th Divisions had made little headway, and we had lost some 7,000 men. Sir Archibald Murray, before the battle was broken off, had issued an order that all ground gained must be held during the night with the object of resuming the attack on Ali Muntar at dawn.

To this order General Dobell not unnaturally demurred. The troops had lost heavily, they were wearied out by the dust and heat of a torrid day, the water supply was difficult, and the strength of the Turkish position was now fully revealed. Sir Philip Chetwode agreed with this view, and Sir Archibald Murray allowed himself to be persuaded. If the frontal attack was to be persisted in, reinforcements must be awaited; if some new plan

were adopted, there must be certain adjustments of communications to support it. Accordingly the British front remained as it had been on the night of the 19th. No serious enemy counter-attacks followed. One, which might have been formidable, was frustrated by a curious means. An airplane detected some 2,000 Turkish infantry and 800 cavalry assembling on the 20th in a wadi near Hereira. Four of our machines promptly attacked this force, which was in mass *April 20.* formation, and dropped forty-seven bombs on it, scattering it to the winds with heavy losses.

There was no further infantry action during the summer. The British lines lay from Sheikh Ajlin on the sea to the Sheikh Abbas Ridge, and then turned back to the Wadi Ghuzze, with their right flank extended to Shellal, whither a branch railway was being constructed from Rafa. There was a good deal of shelling at various points on the front, and one or two brilliant cavalry enterprises, notably that of 23rd-24th May against the Beer- *May 23-* sheba-El Auja railway, to prevent the enemy using its material for constructing *24.* a new branch line. Under cover of an artillery bombardment of the Gaza front, a brigade of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division moved out to Esani on the afternoon of the 22nd. That night they took Khalasa, and the demolition parties reached the railway at Asluj and Hadaj by 7 a.m. on the 23rd. Meantime the Imperial Camel Corps, which had left Rafa early on the 22nd, reached El Auja at 11.45 a.m. on the 23rd. Between them they destroyed thirteen miles of line and nine bridges, besides a large quantity of engineering

material, crops and buildings, and their total casualty list was one man wounded.

General Dobell, who had behind him a long record of difficult tropical warfare, and had been suffering for some time from the effects of sun-stroke, resigned the command of the Eastern Force after the second battle of Gaza, and was succeeded by Sir Philip Chetwode. Major-General Chauvel was the new commander of the Desert Column, and he was replaced in the command of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division by Major-General Chaytor. After the second battle Sir Archibald Murray was recalled to England to report, and his place as Commander-in-Chief was filled by Sir Edmund Allenby, one of the foremost of British cavalry leaders, who came fresh from the command of the victorious Third Army at Arras.

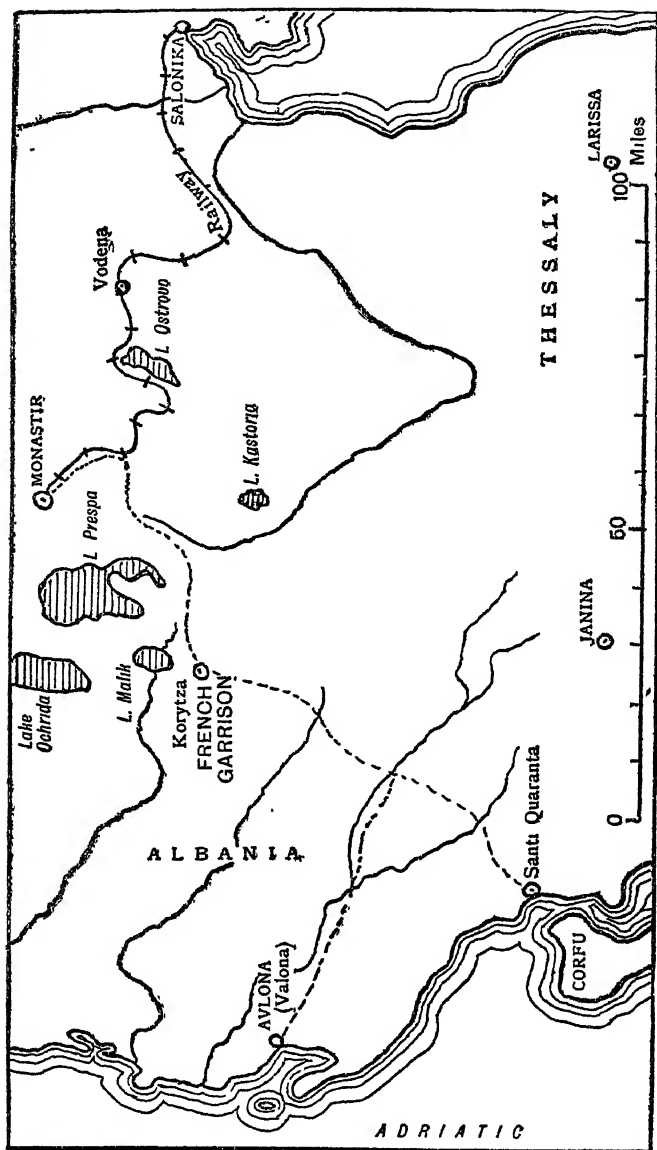
Gaza was a check to British arms as undoubted as Gallipoli, and of a very similar type. The chance of a surprise failed through no fault of generalship, and when the next attempt was made it could only be a frontal attack, against which the enemy front had hardened like concrete. It was unfortunate that such a check came at the end of so laborious and successful an enterprise as the Sinai campaign. The various stages in its advance—Katia, Romani, El Arish, Magdhaba, Rafa—had been brilliantly won. No desert campaign had ever been conducted with more expert foresight and skill. The engineering feats alone were sufficient to make it remarkable. The 150 miles of the Sinai Desert had defeated most conquerors who thought to force those dusty fastnesses, and the thing was not accomplished without the most meticulous organization. The troops who

fought at Gaza were drinking water which came from Egypt. The chief obstacle was nature, but the enemy was no bad second. He was skilfully led, and in the later stages he was numerically superior to the invader.\* The Russian *degringolade* had done its work, and divisions had been released from the Caucasus for Syria. But in spite of the check at Gaza the foundations had been laid for future success. The road had been made once and for all across the desert, and it was only a matter of months till troops and guns and supplies could travel it for a new concentration. A settled war of positions was not inevitable in such a land, and the little branch line creeping eastward from Rafa to Shellal was the fingerpost pointing to a far more deadly offensive.

The Allied front at Salonika lay unchanged through the four months following the capture of Monastir. West of the Vardar the line was held against the Bulgarian First Army by the Italian, Russian, French, and Serbian forces, and—at the end of the year—by the Greek contingent. Then the front followed pretty closely the old Serbian border among the mountains which form the watershed between the Vardar and the Tcherná. West of these mountains the famous loop of the Tcherná was within the Allied lines, which ran north of Mon-

\* At Gaza Sir A. Murray had the 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 74th, and 75th Divisions—all British Territorials except the last, which contained a few Indian units. He also had two mounted divisions, and the Camel Corps. The Turks at the second battle of Gaza had at least five infantry divisions, and probably before the end of the battle more cavalry. In May they had eight infantry divisions.

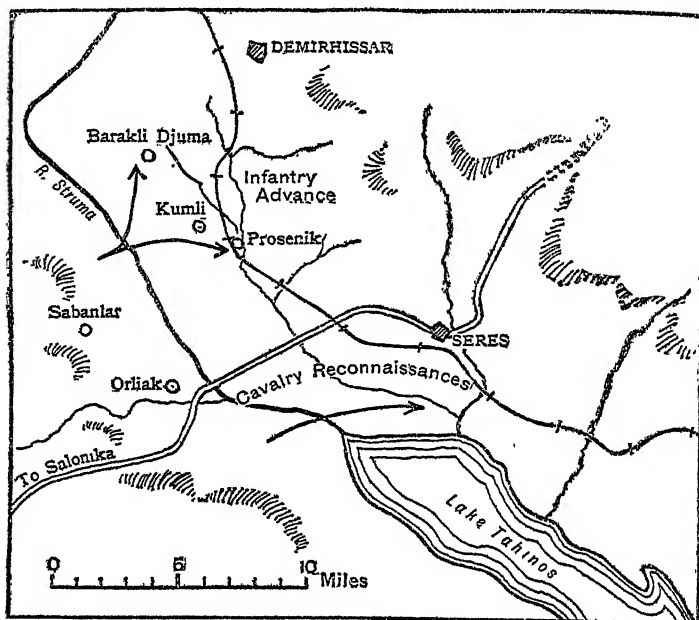




Communications between Salonika and the Adriatic Ports held by the Italians.

astir to the Albanian frontier south of Lake Ochrida, and thence by a loose chain of posts to Avlona. The British army under General Milne faced the Bulgarian Second Army from the Vardar to the Struma, on the line of the lakes Doiran, Butkova, and Tahinos, a distance of some ninety miles. It was a long front for the forces at General Milne's disposal, and the exceptionally wet and stormy winter did not make his task easier. Moreover, many of the troops had been in line without relief for over a year, and they had had none of the exhilaration of a vigorous offensive. Much had been done to improve the highways and a new road had been constructed to the front on both sides of the Doiran lake, but the mountain paths still remained precarious and difficult. In the Struma valley the British right had been carried across the river close up to the enemy front among the foothills from Butkova to Barakli Djuma, and British cavalry pushed reconnaissances between Seres and Lake Tahinos beyond the Seres-Demirhissar railway. In November, after several brilliant little actions, the villages of Barakli Djuma, Kumli, and Prosenik were taken, together with many prisoners.

The Struma line having been secured, General Milne turned his attention to the more difficult Doiran front. By various raids our position was improved, and the offensive spirit of the troops sustained. At the end of February General Sarrail informed his commanders that he proposed to take the offensive during the first week of April, as part of the great combined movement of all the Allies which had been planned for the spring. It was not easy during a dripping and boisterous March



The Advance across the Struma.

to secure the positions preliminary to a great attack, more especially in the Doiran sector, where the main objective was the ridge between the lakes and the Vardar. But by the end of March 1,000 yards had been won on a front of 3,000, and we were ready to attack the strong enemy salient in front of Doiran town.

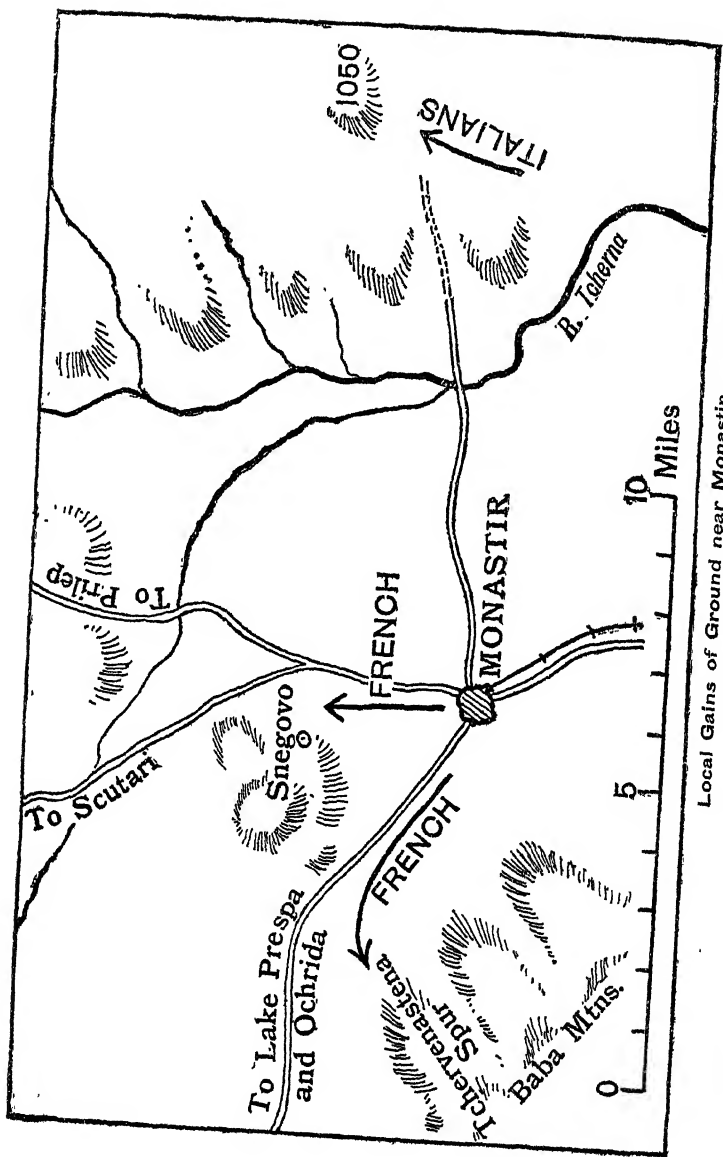
Meantime during March the French and Italians in the Monastir area had been continuously engaged.

*March 13-* On the 13th the Italians advanced against Hill 1,050 in the bend of the Tchernavostok east of Monastir. On the 17th the French took the village of Snegovo, less than four

miles north of the town, and by the 21st had pushed up the Tchervenastena spur of the Baba range to the west. Five days later they captured its crest. During these operations over 2,000 *March 26.* prisoners were taken, of whom twenty-nine were officers. Farther west there had been some activity earlier in the year. Between the Italians at Avlona and the rest of the Allied front lay a considerable gap through which ran the Janina-Koritza road. In February an advance was begun into Southern Albania, and by the middle of the month the gap was closed by the Italian occupation of the Janina road from Koritza to the Greek frontier.

The main offensive was postponed by Sarraïl to 24th April, and on that day the British, after a long bombardment, attacked the Doiran fortress. Its formidable strength may be *April 24.* gathered from the description of a correspondent :—

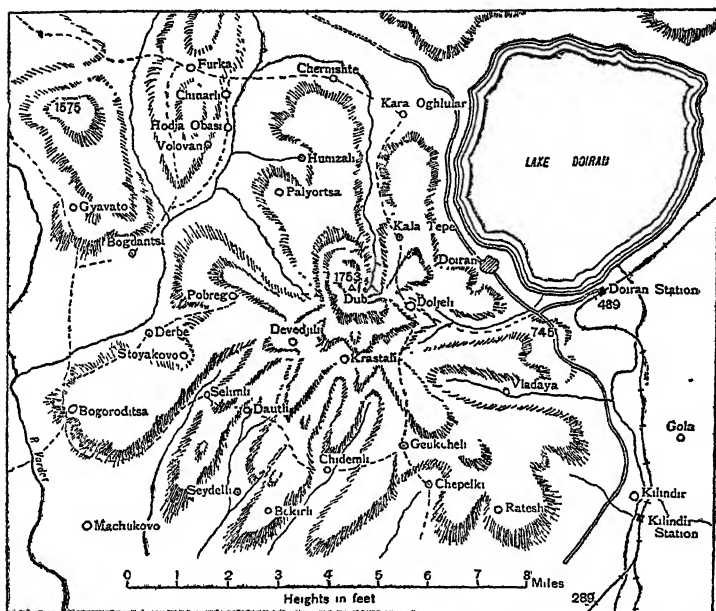
“As you look at the position from the front you are strongly reminded of an old mediæval citadel. In one corner of the *enceinte* you usually find a concentrated group of towers and bastions that were the main stronghold of defence. Over-topping everything is the keep, but all around are lesser towers and turrets, each supporting the other. The configuration of the ground in this corner by Lake Doiran is an exact parallel to such a mediæval fortress. Hill 535 is the keep of the enemy citadel. It towers above the other hills he holds, and for eight months, ever since we took over this sector from the French, the Dub, as it is called, has haunted the British Army. Go where you will, that blunt, bald-browed head is looking at you. . . . The Dub is the strongest point of the enemy's third and main line of defence. His twin height in the same trench system is the Grand Couronné, a mile nearer the lake, only less conspicuous than himself—a steep, barren, conical hill ringed round with trenches. From the Dub runs down towards our line a long rampart-like ridge known as ‘The Pips,’ from the five humps to which



Local Gains of Ground near Monastir.

it rises in its descent. Each of these minor eminences is strongly fortified. Pip 3 is the bastion of the second line of defence."

The first enemy line had Pip  $4\frac{1}{2}$  as its western



The Dub and the Ground between Lake Doiran and the Vardar.

sentry. Its principal bastion was a bare sugar-loaf hill called the Petit Couronné. In front of it, along its whole length, to complete the likeness to a mediæval castle, ran a moat, the deep gully called the Jumeaux Ravine. The British troops crossed the parapets at 9.45 p.m. on the evening of 24th April—the latest hour at which any battle in the

campaign had begun. On the left all the enemy's first positions were taken, from Doldjeli village to Pip 4½. In the centre and right, however, the difficulties of the Jumeaux Ravine were so great that only a few of the Devons and the Berkshires reached the other side, and during the night that handful was driven back by counter-attacks. The end of the battle left us with the western half of the enemy's first position, which we succeeded in securing and holding.

General Sarrail had found himself obliged to postpone the attack of the rest of the army at Monastir and west of the Vardar. On the 8th of May

*May 8.* General Milne was instructed to make his second attempt, and he resolved to confine it to the section between the lake and the Petit Couronné. On the right gains were made on the slopes of the Petit Couronné, but lost by noon of the following day. Farther west a more considerable advance was made, and our line was pushed farther forward on the 15th and 20th. The result of the battle was that, at the expense of heavy casualties, we held a considerable part of the first Bulgarian line, our front running along the ridge from south of Krastali to Sejdelli village. On the 24th

*May 24.* General Sarrail ordered operations to cease throughout the battleground. It was not easy to see on what principle they had ever been undertaken.

The problem before General Milne was now the advent of the summer heats, with the grave risk of malaria and dysentery among the marshy valleys. To lessen the danger he abandoned his forward positions on his right and right centre, and, with-

out interference from the enemy, withdrew his troops to the foothills on the right bank of the Struma and to the south of the Butkovo valley. The Salonika front returned to its normal condition of trench bickering, but the monotony was broken by the dispatch of detachments for garrison duty in Greece itself. For during June the kaleidoscopic politics of Athens had suffered a sudden and violent transformation.

The opening of 1917 had found the Athens Government in a more tractable frame of mind. Lambros was still Prime Minister, Dousmanis and his friends were still the king's advisers, but the Court and Army had done penance for the outrage of December, and the Greek divisions, in accordance with the Allied demands, were being moved to the Peloponnesus. But the peace was only seeming, and, as the world was to learn from later revelations, the nest of German intriguers in Athens was busy as ever. There were outbreaks of hooliganism the source of which was easily traceable, and evidence accumulated daily to show that King Constantine was very far from fulfilling the spirit of his assurances to the Allies. The latter were compelled to stiffen their demands, and in order to provide a buffer M. Lambros retired, and the respectable but ineffective M. Zaimis came again into power on 4th May. Meantime the authority of M. Venizelos and his National *May 4.* Government at Salonika continued to grow in spite of all the diplomatic obstacles set to its expansion. Some of the chief islands—Corfu, Zante, Cephalonia, Skiathos, Cythera—declared for him, and the



Allies were forced to respect the declaration. In Thessaly, even in the Royalist strongholds, the leaven was working. A general satiety with King Constantine's rule, much increased by the stringent Allied blockade, was spreading throughout Greece. And by the end of May Venizelos had some 60,000 fighting men at his command to place by the Allies' side.

To the ordinary observer in the West at this time it seemed that King Constantine, having done the Allies' bidding, might now be let alone. But the men on the spot were aware that he was intriguing all the while with the enemy, and that his restless, shallow spirit would not be content with the rôle assigned to him. In dealing with such a character a certain harshness was inevitable, for apologies and protestations could not be taken at their face value, and the most solemn pact was meaningless, since honesty and goodwill were wanting. Moreover, various obstacles which had previously barred drastic action were now gone. Revolutionary Russia had small affection for kinglets, and Italy, having been given certain liberties of action on the Adriatic sea-board, was ready to sanction what she had formerly vetoed. By the end of May it was very clear that the day of reckoning with King Constantine was nigh.

From the first days of June events marched swiftly. On the 3rd Italy proclaimed the inde-  
*June 3-8.* pendency of Albania under her protec-  
 tion, and on the 8th occupied Janina, thereby cutting the last open line of communica-  
 tion between Athens and the Central  
*June 6.* Powers. On the 6th M. Charles Jonnart  
 arrived at Salamis in a French ship of war as High

Commissioner appointed by the Allied Powers. He had been Foreign Minister in M. Briand's 1913 Ministry, and in his earlier career had played the part in Algeria which Lord Cromer played in Egypt. He stopped for a few hours at Salamis, and then continued his journey to Salonika, where he saw Sarraïl and Venizelos. On Sunday, the 10th, French and British troops entered Thessaly, partly to safeguard the harvest *June 10.*

and partly to occupy certain points of strategic value like Volo and Larissa. For long Sarraïl's left rear had been infested with bands of reservist *komitadjis*, and in view of coming events it was necessary to secure that area. At Larissa there was some treacherous shooting by a Greek detachment, but in most places the Allies were welcomed as liberators.

On Monday, 11th June, French troops seized the Isthmus of Corinth, and that evening M. Jonnart arrived at Athens, accompanied by Allied transports. He summoned M. *June 11.* Zaimis to an interview on board his warship. The Prime Minister was informed that the Allies meant to purchase the Thessalian crop and distribute it equitably among all the Greek provinces. M. Jonnart added that they were now compelled to seek more satisfactory guarantees for the safety of the Army of Salonika, and that these could only be found in a restoration of the unity of Greece and the revival of a true constitutional government. He, therefore, in the name of the protecting Powers, demanded the abdication of King Constantine and the nomination of his successor, that successor to be another than the Crown Prince.

M. Zaimis returned with his message, and a

Crown Council was summoned. All that day there were alarms and excursions in the Athens streets. The bells of the city were rung spasmodically, and shouting and protesting crowds hung around the Palace. At three in the afternoon King Constantine signed an act of abdication in favour of his second son, Prince Alexander. On Tuesday morn-

*June 12.* ing M. Jonnart received formal intimation of the act, and that afternoon a royal proclamation was posted up in the streets. "Obeying necessity and fulfilling my duty towards Greece, I am departing from my beloved country accompanied by the heir to the Crown, and I am leaving my son Alexander on the throne. I beg you to accept my decision with calm." That same day the new king issued his first proclamation, and he could scarcely be blamed if in that document filial piety was more conspicuous than political tact.

"At the moment when my august father, making a supreme sacrifice to our dear country, entrusts to me the heavy duties of the Hellenic throne, I express but one single wish, that God, hearing his prayer, will protect Greece; that He will permit us to see her again united and powerful.

"In my grief at being separated in circumstances so critical from my well-beloved father, I have a single consolation: to carry out his sacred mandate, which I will endeavour to realize with all my power, following the lines of his brilliant reign, with the help of the people upon whose love the Greek dynasty is supported.

"I am convinced that, in obeying the wishes of my father, the people by their submission will do their part in enabling us together to rescue our dear country from the terrible situation in which it finds itself."

That afternoon French troops began to disembark at the Peiræus. About 5 p.m. the ex-king and

his family left Athens for the summer palace at Tatoi, and early next morning embarked on the royal yacht at the village of Oropus, on the Gulf of Eubœa. Accompanied by *June 13.* two French destroyers, the *Sphacteria* steamed westward for an Italian port, carrying its master to a Swiss health resort. The world had become very full of kings in exile, but to Constantine the sentimental pity usually accorded to those who fall from high estate could scarcely be granted. He had amply earned his punishment, and bore with him the memory of no single honest and courageous action—only loose-lipped speeches and shabby intrigues.

The Germanophil party had no further cards to play. The worst of them, such as the German Streit, General Dousmanis, the ex-Premier M. Gounaris, and Colonel Metaxas, were promptly expelled from the country. Others, such as M. Lambros and M. Skouloudis, were allowed to remain under police supervision. The abdication was received with complete calm by the country at large. On the 14th the Allied blockade of Greece came to an end. On the 19th a committee *June 14-19.* of four was appointed, consisting of two representatives of the Athens Government and two of the National Government at Salonika, to consider methods of reconstruction. On *June 21.* the 21st, at the invitation of M. Jonnart, M. Venizelos arrived at the Peiræus, where he saw M. Zaimis, and came to an agreement with him about the next step. Clearly the decree which had illegally dissolved the Greek Chamber in November 1915 must be annulled, and that Chamber, which

had been legally elected on June 13, 1915, convoked, and the leader of its parliamentary majority called to power. On 25th June M. Zaimis resigned, and two days later M. 27. Venizelos formed a cabinet, and set about the laborious task of rebuilding the ruins of his country.

The long game, the patient game, had succeeded. M. Venizelos, biding his time, had lived to see a divided Greece gradually draw towards unity from sheer weariness of discord. Quietly and firmly he began to build, loyal to the new monarch, loyal to the Allies, loyal above all to his country. In his reconstruction he revealed the same wisdom that he had shown in the dark days of waiting, and while he dealt drastically with treason, proved himself in all matters a constitutional statesman, respecting scrupulously the rights and liberties of his most bitter opponents. His work lay in a narrow area, and his problems were on a small scale compared with those which faced his colleagues of Western Europe; but in the mental and moral endowments of the statesman he had no superior, and perhaps no equal, among living men.

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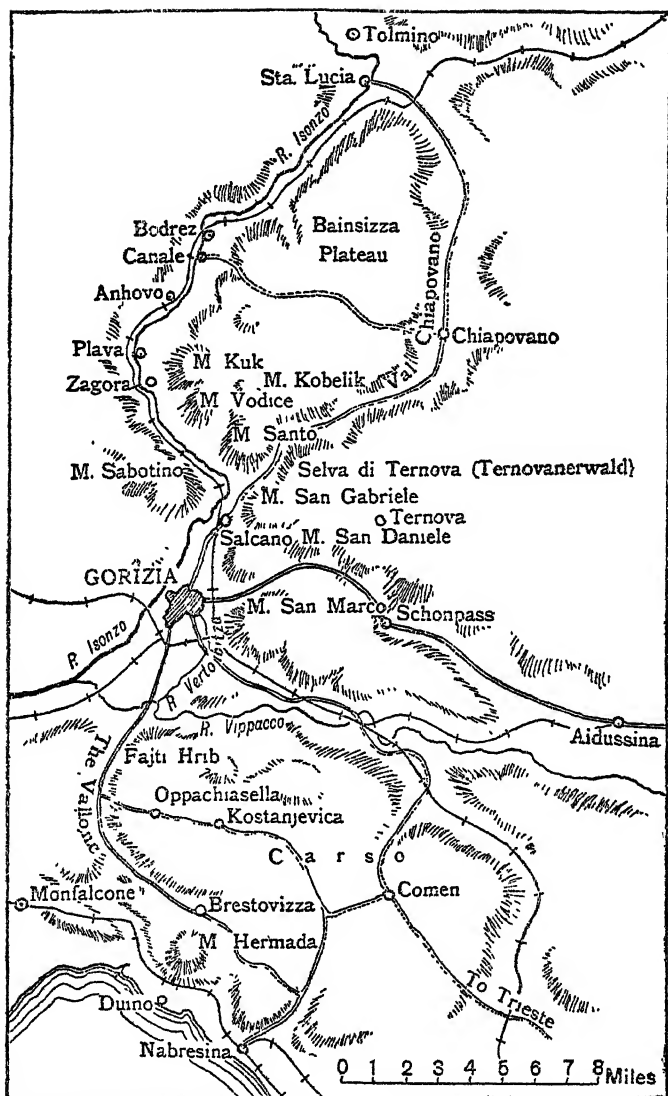
## CHAPTER CXXXVII.

### ITALY'S CAMPAIGN SINCE THE FALL OF GORIZIA.

Italian Position in the Carso on August 15, 1916—Difficulty of Cadorna's Problem—The Carso Attack of 14th September—The Attack of 10th October—Attack of 31st October—Brilliant Success of the Third Army—Austrian Counter-Attacks—Italians carry Fajti Hrib—The Winter closes down—Italy's Great Effort during Winter of 1916-17—Sir W. Robertson's Visit to Italy—Cadorna's Plans for the Spring—Attack of 14th May in the Isonzo Gorge—Capture of Kuk and Vodice—Attack of 23rd May on the Carso—Fall of Hudi Log and Jamiano—Italians reach the Skirts of Hermada—Successful Austrian Counter-Attack—Summary of Results—Nature of Fighting on the Julian Front—Activity in Cadore and the Trentino—Cadorna's Prospects at Midsummer 1917—The Cloud on the Horizon.

CADORNA'S advance in August 1916, which had given him Gorizia, reached the close of its first stage about the 15th of that month. Apart from the little city which had been his main objective, he had won *Aug. 15,* the great range from Podgora to Sabotino *1916.* which dominated the Isonzo ; his centre had been pushed to the Vertoibizza ; and his right wing on the Carso had crossed the depression of the Vallona, and held Oppacchiasella and positions on the eastern ridges. These pages have often emphasized the peculiar difficulties of Italy's campaign. The front on the Isonzo was always in the condition of being

turned on its left flank and rear, and only an assiduous watch in Carnia, Cadore, and on the Trentino battlements prevented a peril which, had it become active, would have led to complete disaster. Even in the single section of the Isonzo the situation was intricate and difficult, and those who talked glibly of a dash for Laibach or Trieste had small acquaintance with the terrain. North of Gorizia the Isonzo runs in a deep trench, and, save for a bridge-head at Plava, the enemy held all the eastern shore from Monte Santo to Tolmino. This eastern bank rises in sharp wooded ridges to the height of nearly 2,000 feet, and from its crest runs north-east the great Bainsizza plateau between the Isonzo and the Val Chiapovano. South of this last glen, and at right angles to the main river, the south rim of the Selva di Ternova, or Ternovanerwald, stretches eastward, with its peaks of Monte San Gabriele and Monte San Daniele defending the Gorizian plain from the north. Till these were mastered, there could be no advance from Gorizia along the railway to Trieste. East of the city the Austrians held the low wooded ridge of San Marco, and the east bank of the Vertoibizza up to the edge of the Carso, along whose foot flowed from the east the little river Vippacco. The Western Carso had already been won, but the Carso east of the Vallone was a harder problem. Desolate and stony in the interior, it had shaggy wooded fringes—the ridge above the Vippacco in the north, and in the south Hermada and the coast foothills. Its tableland was tilted towards the north-east, where it ascended from the Vallone in a great staircase to the crest called the Iron Gates, south of Dornberg.



General Sketch Map of the Isonzo Front from Tolmino to the Sea.



It is necessary to recapitulate this topography that the strength of the Austrian position may be understood. Two facts must be kept in mind. The first is, that no advance eastwards through the Gorizian plain was practicable till Santo, Gabriele, and Daniele, the rim of the Ternovanerwald, had been won, and that to win these points the Italians must first scale the steep ridge east of the Isonzo and carry the Bainsizza plateau. The second is, that for the same advance the Carso must be carried, and that with every mile the place became a stronger fortress. To force the ridge of the Iron Gates by direct attack was impracticable, and the best chance was a turning movement by the south. But to block this rose Hermada, one labyrinth of tunnels and trenches and bristling with guns. The task before Cadorna was a slow and formidable one, and could only be performed by patient stages. Moreover, it must be performed by alternate blows—now at the Santo Ridge, now on the Carso, for each demanded a full concentration. Till Gabriele and Daniele were won in the north and Hermada on the south, the Austrians in Trieste might sleep secure.

The Carso was fixed as the theatre of the next movement, and something like a month was occupied in preparation. The Italian line now ran from the Vippacco, east of the hill called Nad Logem, east of Oppacchiasella, west of the hamlet of Nova Vas, east of the Lake of Doberdo, and thence to the coast marshes about Porto Rosega. It was held

*Sept. 14.* by the Third Army, under the Duke of Aosta. On the morning of 14th September a great bombardment began between the Vip-

pacco and the sea, in which the *bombarda*, the giant 11-inch trench mortar, played a chief part. Just after midday a thunderstorm broke on the Carso, and when, in the early afternoon, the Italian infantry advanced it was in a downpour of rain. In the centre, east of Nad Logem, they succeeded at once, and took large numbers of prisoners. On the right there was desperate fighting around Nova Vas and Hill 208 to the south, and no impression was made on the extreme right, where Hills 144 and 77 were supported by the guns from Hermada. On the left the Italians surrounded the little hill where stood San Grado di Merna.

All night thunderstorms rattled among the stony scarps, and with the wet dawn the batteries began again. At midday on the 15th came *Sept. 15.* the next attack, which gave the Italians San Grado as well as some gains at Lokvica\* and

\* A short list may be given of the chief place-names which are spelled differently on Austrian and on Italian maps:—

<i>Austrian.</i>	<i>Italian.</i>
Flitsch.	Plezzo.
Tolmein.	Tolmino.
Gorizia.	Görz.
Wippach.	Vippacco (sometimes Frigido).
Volkovnjak.	Vugognacco.
Fajti Hrib.	Faiti or Dosso Faiti.
Kuk.	Monte Kuk, Cucco, Cocceo.
Nova Vas.	Villanova.
Kostanjevica.	Castagnevizza.
Hudi Log.	Boscomalo.
Lukatic.	Locati.
Hermada.	Querceto.
Lokvica.	Locvizza.

Oppacchiasella. Next day, the 16th, the line was farther advanced, and on the following day Austrian counter-attacks were decisively repulsed. So far, in the four days' battle, the Duke of Aosta had taken between 4,000 and 5,000 prisoners, but he had not won any vital position. The Austrians showed the most dogged tenacity in defence, and they were well served by the nature of their fortifications. To quote from an Italian *communiqué*: "Their new trenches had been prepared months ago, and had been strengthened and deepened as soon as the Italian offensive which resulted in the taking of Gorizia began. Many of these were blasted out of the rock to the depth of about six feet, faced with a low parapet of sandbags, and protected with steel shields, as experience had taught the Austrians not to use stones in the construction of their breast-works, and to avoid offering even the smallest target to the Italian artillery and trench mortars. Moreover, caverns and deep dug-outs protected the defenders during bombardment. The undulating ground, broken by innumerable crater-like holes in the limestone, and here and there covered by small woods, lends itself admirably to obstinate resistance with concealed emplacements and hidden machine guns. Everywhere they had barbed-wire entanglements, much of which, being concealed, escaped destruction."

Once more the Italian bombardment was renewed, and with it came the rain. Low mists hung over the plateau, observation from the air was impossible, and it was not till 10th October that the next attack was made. The





The Carso, showing the progress of the Italian offensive in the autumn of 1916.





infantry of the Third Army advanced at 2.45 p.m. in a thin fog, and were immediately successful. They straightened out the kinks which had been left from the September battle, winning notably the remainder of the Hill 208 position, and Hill 144 east of Lake Doberdo. The Italian front now ran nearly straight from Hill 144 to the Vippacco, and included the whole of the old Austrian front which had been attacked in September. There was also a slight gain farther west, south-east of Gorizia, between the villages of Sober and Vertojba. The prisoners made that day exceeded 5,000, and included 164 officers.

Next morning, 11th October, the Austrians counter-attacked in dense fog, especially against the Italian left. In the after-noon, when the weather had cleared, the Italians again advanced, and during that night and the following day there was a fierce struggle for Sober and the new line on Hill 144.

*Oct. 11.*

*Oct. 12.*

At Sober alone, on a single battalion front, 400 dead were counted. That afternoon the Italians carried the hill of Pecinka in the centre, and got into the outskirts of the villages of Lokvica and Hudi Log, more than a mile east of Nova Vas. Once more the line was as serrated as it had been in September.

On the 13th, in wild weather, the Duke of Aosta's left pushed north of Sober to the Gorizia-Prvacina road, and brought their capture of prisoners up to 8,000. But the continuing tempest—the same chain of gales which dislocated our plans on the Somme—forced the battle to a standstill, and compelled the Italians to withdraw a little from Pecinka, Lokvica, and Hudi

*Oct. 13.*



Log. For a fortnight the rains continued, and then very slowly the mist began to rise, and a chill, the first hint of winter, crept into the air. On 30th

*Oct. 30.* October the skies were clear, and from dawn to dusk there was such a bombardment as even the Carso had not seen. Fog had settled on the ridges again, but it was the fog of powdered earth, splintered stone, and the fumes of the great shells. The guns roared all night,

*Oct. 31.* and on the morning of the 31st, at ten minutes past eleven, the Italian infantry crossed the parapets, to be met with a hurricane of shrapnel as soon as they showed in the open. On the left the 11th Corps won back all the ground that had been relinquished, carried Pecinka and Lokvica, and within an hour, by a brilliant flanking movement, had the summit of Veliki Hribac. Thence they swept on to the hill named 376. The Italian centre south of Lokvica moved along the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road, and came within a thousand yards of the latter place. The right wing, operating along the southern rim of the Carso plateau, took Hill 238 and the village of Jamiano, but could not maintain itself against the fire from the Hermada guns. That hollow east of Hill 144, the southern end of the Vallone, became a nether pit of smoke and death.

The day had been for the Third Army a remarkable victory, for on a front of more than two miles, between the north edge of the Carso and the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road, the Austrian line had been shattered. A large number of enemy batteries were taken, and nearly 5,000 prisoners, including 132 officers. But a pronounced salient had been

created, and a salient is always liable to a counter-stroke. The Austrians had been so roughly handled that it was not till 2nd November that their guns woke. All the ground won *Nov. 2.*

by the Italian centre was plastered with shells, and since the Italians were largely in the open, the old trenches having been destroyed, their sufferings were severe. Of the Bersaglieri brigade which had taken Pecinka there is told a fine tale. All night the brigadier and the commanders of the 6th and 12th Regiments walked up and down the front line to give confidence to their men, and in the morning of the three only one was left. About midday *Nov. 3.* the enemy launched his infantry against

Pecinka and Hill 308, in order to drive a wedge into the salient. He failed, and the Italians again swept forward, taking Hill 399 and the crowning position of Fajti Hrib.

Fajti Hrib is the highest point of the step of the great staircase which runs from the Vippacco to Kostanjevica. It commanded the last-named village and also the road which ran to the east from north to south across the plateau. The situation was grave for the enemy's centre, but for the moment he had to content himself with fruitless counter-attacks on the flanks. The Italian salient was now as deep as it was broad—some two miles each way—and the danger of a counter-attack at the re-entrants was great. But on 3rd November the 49th Division moved downhill from the rim of the Carso, and occupied the line of the Vippacco west of Biglia, and so protected the northern flank of the salient. Farther south during the same day other troops occupied Hill 291, and came within 200 yards of

Kostanjevica. In the three days' fighting the Third Army had taken 8,750 prisoners, including 270 officers.

The Austrians were now back everywhere on their third line. Part of it, from the Vippacco to Kostanjevica, was an improvised line constructed during the September attack. But from Kostanjevica south it was largely the old first line, made long before Gorizia fell, and moreover its strength was increased by the formidable concealed batteries on Hermada. It was clear that Hermada was the real obstacle, and that no progress could be made till a way was found of taking order with it. This meant a great concentration of guns and a halt for preparations; but meantime the winter closed down, and, though all through December Cadorna waited in readiness hoping for fine weather, about Christmas he had to abandon his plan, and postpone the next effort to the spring. During November and December the rain fell in sheets: every ravine was a torrent, and every depression a morass. The *bora* scourged the bleak uplands, and with the new year came frost and snow, so that the Isonzo front was scarcely less arctic than the glacier posts in Trentino or the icy eyries in the Dolomites. It was a bitter winter for the front lines; but through it all a perpetual toil went on to improve positions, to contrive gun emplacements, to complete a network of communication trenches, in preparation for the campaign which the next season would bring. The troops could look back upon four months of brilliant achievement. But Italy was now at war with Germany as well as with Austria, and her High Command had little doubt that 1917 would prove

a supreme test of their country's valour and resolution.

During the first three months of 1917 there was a constant bickering along the fronts in the Trentino, the Dolomites, and on the Isonzo, but no movement other than an occasional trench raid. Italy was busy behind the lines preparing for a great effort, and the work of these winter months compared even with the great activity in Northern France. Since the summer of 1916 2,000 miles of military roads had been constructed by the Austrians between the Adige and Cadore, and they imitated their opponents by a lavish preparation of "wireways," some of them having a length of from twenty-five to forty miles. They had thirty-six or thirty-seven divisions on the front, of which perhaps sixteen were on the Isonzo line. Italy was not behind in her effort. She raised and trained new regiments; she vastly increased her batteries and munition; and she brought her aircraft fleet to a strength considerably beyond that of her enemy. During this period the Italian press was full of tales of a great Austro-German offensive to be launched under von Mackensen in the spring, and German troops were daily rumoured on every part of the front. In late March Sir William Robertson and General Weygand, Foch's Chief of Staff, visited Italy, and discussed with Cadorna the plans for the coming campaign. There was as yet no unity in the Allied Command, but there was more unity in the higher staff work than critics were aware of.

The omens pointed beyond doubt to a Teutonic offensive as soon as the weather improved, and it

was the business of Cadorna to forestall it. He had hoped to attack in April, but the lateness of the spring forced him to hold his hand. His plan was to engage the enemy on the whole Isonzo line, from Tolmino to the sea, by an intense artillery action, so as to puzzle him as to where exactly the infantry were to be launched. At the same time, by showing a vigorous front in the Trentino he would hold off the assault which the enemy had for some weeks threatened in that quarter. When the appointed day came, he would strike hard with his left on the Isonzo against the Austrian position on the steep heights from Santo to north of Plava; and then, as soon as the enemy had concentrated his reserves there, launch a great attack on the Southern Carso toward Hermada.

On 12th May began the Italian bombardment, in which British heavy artillery assisted, and by the morning of the 14th it had attained a hurricane fury. The main section of *May 12,* 1917. attack was that between Globna, a mile north of Plava, and the defile of Salcano, almost in the suburbs of Gorizia; but there were demonstrations elsewhere, so that the whole fighting front was nearly twenty miles long. The effect of the guns was so crushing that the Austrian first trenches disappeared, and Italian raiders returned with batches of dazed and broken prisoners. The Italians had but the one bridgehead, that of Plava; but

*May 14.* on the morning of Monday, the 14th, they succeeded in flinging over a second bridge a little downstream, opposite Zagora. About noon the infantry advanced. There were subsidiary actions south of the Vippacco and at Fajti

Hrib, on the Vertoibizza, and at Hill 174, north of Tivoli. But these were only distractive. The great effort was from Plava to Salcano, where General Cappello's Second Army was directed against the heights east of the river. Success came slowly at first. On the left the 95th and 96th Regiments of the Udine Brigade won Hill 383, east of Plava, and the 127th and 128th Regiments of the Florence Brigade, pushing their way gallantly through a devastating fire, reached Hill 535, the northern spur of Monte Kuk. The 231st and 232nd Regiments of the Avellino Brigade crossed by the new bridge at Zagora, and took the fortress of Zagomila. On the right the 230th Regiment of the Campobasso Brigade struggled up the slopes of Monte Santo. It was a creditable day, but as yet far from victory. The attack was for the most part held in the Austrian second line, which was 800 feet above the stream.

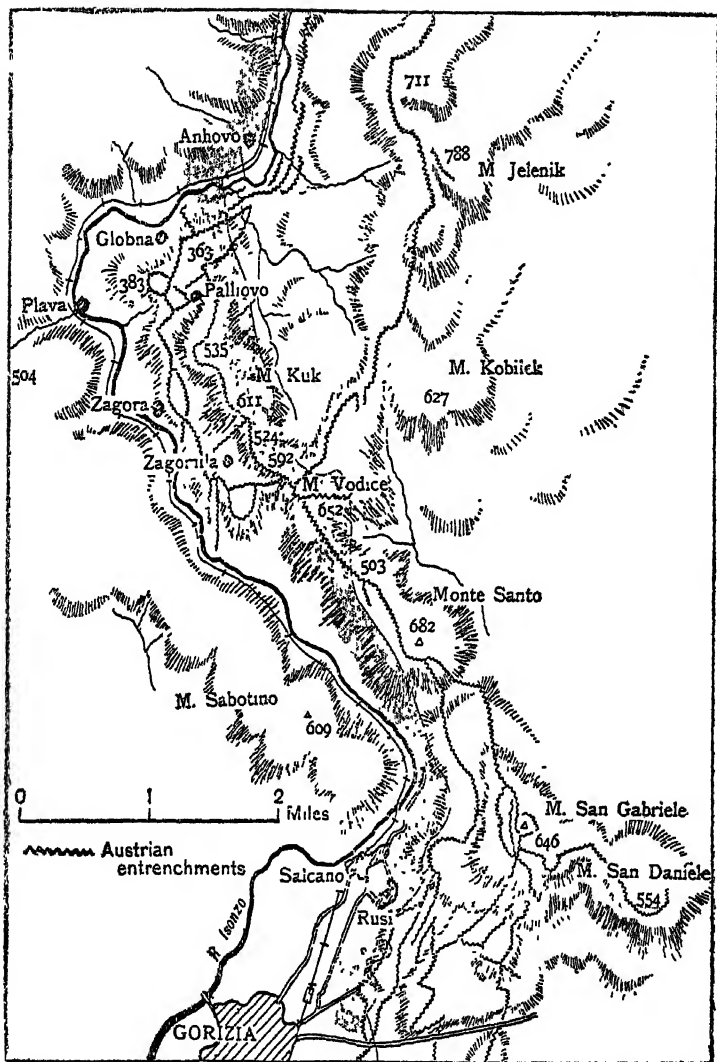
During the darkness two battalions of Bersaglieri and Alpini surprised the enemy and forced a passage of the river near Bodrez, between Plava and Tolmino, where they organized a bridgehead and held their ground. At dawn the attack *May 15.* on the hills was resumed along all the line. The Florence Brigade, a little after midday, reached the northern summit of Monte Kuk (Hill 611); and the Avellino, working up from Zagora, took the southern crest, and drove the enemy out of Hill 524, one of the spurs of Monte Vodice. Less fortunate was the Campobasso Brigade, which found that it could not maintain itself on the ridge of Monte Santo, and had to withdraw well below the summit line. This tremendous fighting, under a

May sun, and up steep wooded slopes of nearly 2,000 feet, had given Cadorna the western gate of the Bainsizza plateau, and observation over all the rear of Monte Santo and the enemy communications for the front on San Gabriele.

It was not to be expected that the Austrians would lose such key-points without a struggle to regain them. Wednesday, the 16th, was

*May 16-* a day of incessant counter-attacks, not  
*22.* only against Kuk and Vodice, but against

the central Carso position. They gained nothing, and the Italians worked their way slowly along the ridge towards Santo, gaining the highest summit (Hill 652) of Vodice. New Austrian batteries, which had been brought from the Russian front and established on the Carso, were hastily sent north of Gorizia. The fight lasted till the 22nd, and was waged not only on the Isonzo, but on the west of Lake Garda, in the Adige valley, and on the front between Asiago and the Val Sugana, the fiercest assault being on the Tooth of Pasubio, a rock tower of the peak which was the key of the Italian line west of Asiago. The honours remained with Cadorna, who added to his gains Hill 363, east of Plava, and the villages of Globna and Palliovo. No such view-ground of war existed elsewhere in Europe, for from the western heights the whole battle could be seen like a spectacle in a theatre. To quote one correspondent: "We see the Italians lying in wait and the crouching Austrians moving to the counter-attack. We see one intrepid leader, who stands on the very summit of the mountain, seemingly an unattainable target, to address his troops before a bayonet assault. We see men who throw up their



The Fighting on the Isonzo, north of Gorizia, showing the front held by the Italians after the advance in May 1917.



arms and fall, and others who rush madly down the mountain, away from that implacable wrath at the top. Those who are seen running down are easily recognized for Austrians by their long greatcoats, which they insist on wearing in spite of the mildness of the air. We hear the megaphone orders shouted out to those who are far ahead of the telephone lines. We see them obeyed. We see the battle rise and fall like the waves of the sea, but we see a general movement which never fails to advance."

Meantime, on the 18th, the bridgehead detachment of Bersaglieri and Alpini far to the north at *May 18.* Bodrez, having fulfilled their task of worrying the enemy's flanks, was withdrawn across the river. It had been a brave adventure. A handful of men had crossed before dawn, building a rough bridge which in an hour or two was destroyed by Austrian shells. They were then left with some hundreds of prisoners in their hands, and a flooded river behind them. They sent back their captives by means of a cable ferry, and prepared to maintain the fort against all comers. For four days they stood their ground, beating off every attack, and even advancing far up the mountain side—two battalions holding a front of two miles.

The result of the first stage of Cadorna's offensive was all that could be desired. The prisoners numbered 7,113, including 163 officers; 18 guns were captured, and a vast quantity of trench mortars and machine guns. The Italians had nearly all the rocky eastern bastion of the Isonzo from Hill 363 opposite Plava, by way of Monte Kuk and the twin

peaks of Vodice, to the saddle of Hill 603, and thence along the western slopes of Santo. Already their guns were hammering the hinterland of Santo and San Gabriele.

The second act of the drama opened on 23rd May, on the front between the southern edge of the Carso and the Adriatic, where was the right wing of the Duke of Aosta's Third Army. *May 23.* On the evening of the 22nd there had been a heavy bombardment, principally in the Santo and San Gabriele section, but there had been comparative quiet on the Carso. But at six o'clock on the morning of the 23rd every gun of the Third Army opened fire, and for ten hours their fury continued, till at four in the afternoon the Italian infantry crossed their parapets. The Duke of Aosta's left wing demonstrated against the line from Volkovnjak southward by Hills 378 and 363. The main attack was that of the centre and right wing, where the 39th and 40th Regiments of the Bologna Brigade carried the Austrian trenches south of the Kostanjevica-Hudi Log road, turned the latter village from the south-east, and swept beyond Lukatic. The right wing took Jamiano, stormed the village of Bagni among the coast marshes west of the mouth of the Timavo, and won the low hills marked 92, 97, 77, and 58. One hundred and thirty airplanes, including a group of hydroplanes, assisted in the battle. The result was that by the evening the Austrian first and second positions had gone, from Kostanjevica to the sea. The enemy, deceived by the feint beyond Gorizia and in the Northern Carso, was completely taken by surprise, and, violent as were his counter-attacks, they were tardy and dis-

organized. Before the day ended, the Italians had taken more than 9,000 prisoners, including 300 officers.

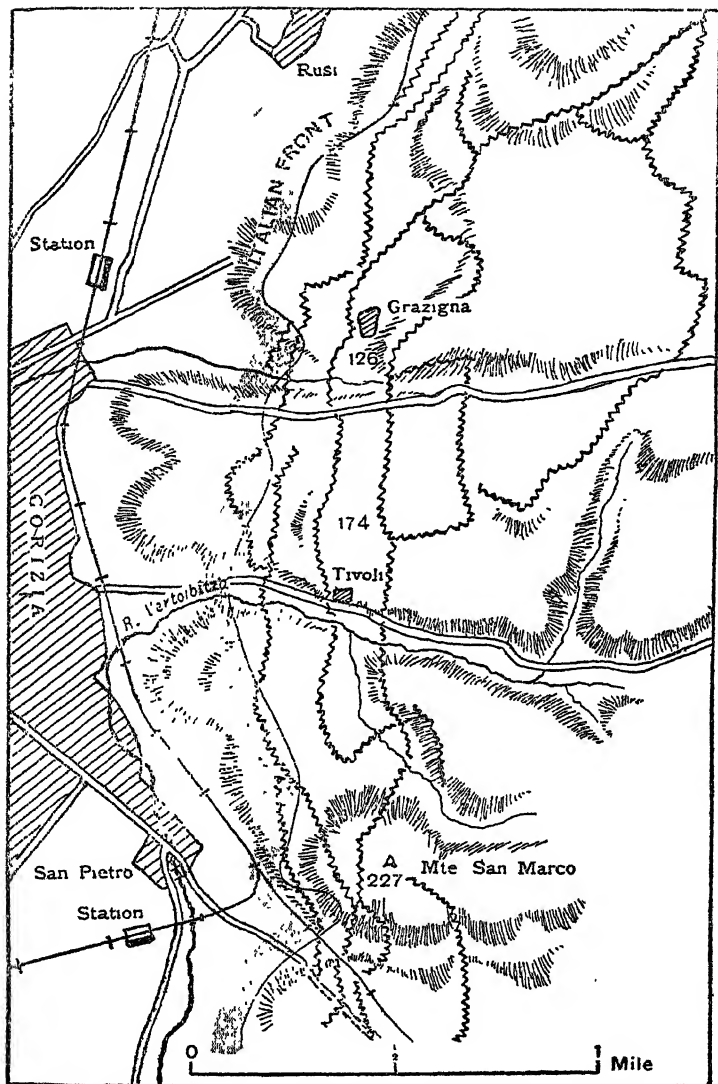
At dawn on Thursday, 24th May, the fight was renewed. Two British monitors, assisted by Italian light craft and seaplanes, bombarded the

*May 24.* seaboard in rear of the Austrian line; for, though the road and railway from Trieste were sheltered by a low ridge of coastal hills, there were exposed gaps at Nabresina and Prosecco. The Barletta Brigade continued to press on the left of the line. The centre, consisting of the Padua and Mantua Brigades, operated against the Hudi Log salient, and won the Hills 235 and 241 north of the Jamiano-Brestovica road. The right—the Tuscan, Arezzo, and Bergamo Brigades, along with the 7th and 11th Regiments of the 2nd Brigade of Bersaglieri—drove the enemy back to a line running from the village of Flondar to the mouth of the Timavo.

On Friday, the 25th, the struggle continued. The left wing of the Third Army fought its way through a fierce barrage from the north

*May 25.* towards Kostanjevica. The centre carried Hudi Log and its labyrinthine salient, and for a moment won a footing in Kostanjevica itself. Its ultimate line was from Hill 202, south-east of Hudi Log, to Hill 251, south of Kostanjevica. The right wing—the 7th Corps—attacking at four in the afternoon, carried Flondar, and pushed outposts on to the heights which lie between Medeazza and San Giovanni. For the first time the Italians stood on the skirts of Hermada.

Next day and the following the weather was bad



The Austrian entrenched positions east of Gorizia, showing the front won by the Italians at the end of the offensive in May and June 1917.

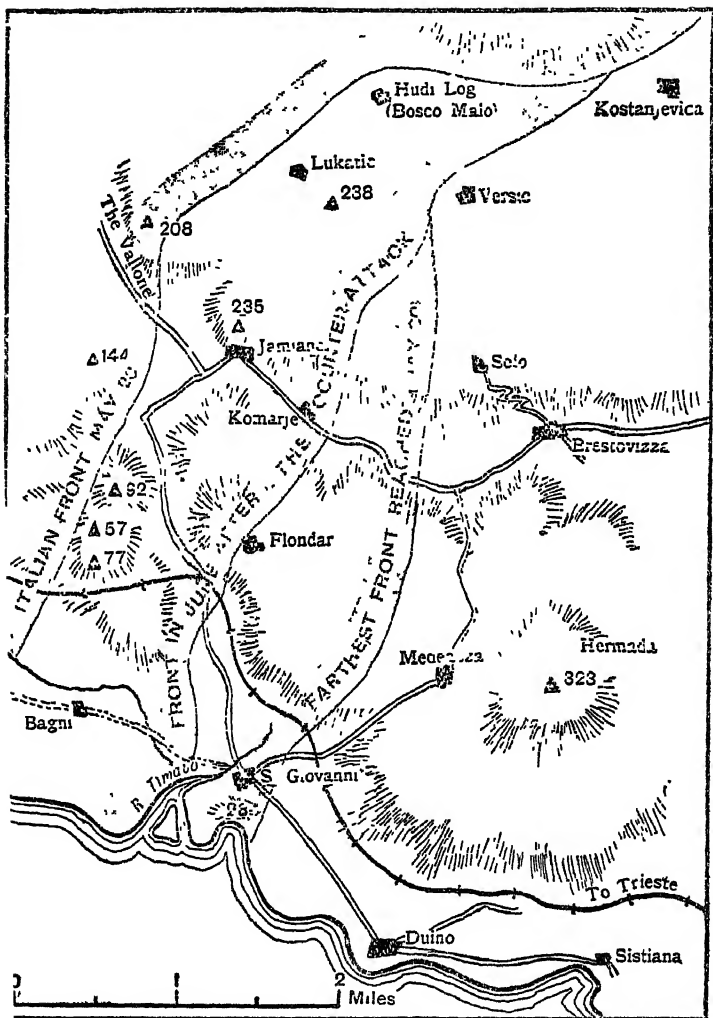
and the progress was slower, though ground was

*May 26-* gained everywhere on the right and  
28. centre, the Timavo was crossed, and the  
village of San Giovanni taken. On

Monday, the 28th, the 45th Division, on the extreme right, took the little seaside hill marked 28, but could not maintain themselves there under the fire from Hermada. Still the marshes had been passed, and the Italian line was firmly on Hermada's skirts, facing the main rampart across the shallow valley beyond Medeazza. Already the south face of the great fortress had been dismantled of its guns, which were withdrawn to safer emplacements in the rear. The Italian troops had suffered greatly, for the five days' battle had been fought on the most arduous battle-ground on earth. In that stony place trenches could not be easily improvised, and since the old Austrian lines had been crushed to atoms, the Italians had, as a rule, to face counter-attacks

*May 30.* in the open. Accordingly a halt was called to rest and refit, and by 30th May, when the weather finally broke, the battle had virtually died away.

The second stage of Cadorna's offensive had prospered well, though scarcely in accordance with the full hopes of its promoters. Prisoners numbered 16,568, including 441 officers; 20 guns were taken, and many more were destroyed by the enemy through fear of capture; and a great quantity of stores of all kinds fell as booty to the attack. Between Kostanjevica and the sea the Italian line had been advanced from one and a half to two and a half miles on a five-mile front, the difficult marsh country had been crossed, and a footing had been won



Operations on the Italian Right, May to June 1917, showing the Italian front before the offensive (May 23), the farthest front reached (May 30), and the front held after the Austrian counter-attack.

on the slopes of Hermada. But the two pivots of the Austrian line still stood firm—the heights around Kostanjevica in the north, and Hermada itself, with its tunnelled rocks and splintered oak woods. The great gain for Cadorna was that he had won elbow-room. He had broken through the larger part of the intricate trench works which had so long constrained him. The whole action from the 14th to the 28th of May was one of the most solid successes yet won by Italian arms. Thirty-eight Austrian guns had been taken, and 23,680 prisoners, including 604 officers. It was notable that the Austrians claimed some 14,000 prisoners, and probably with truth. Troops which advanced too far in assault in such a country were either destroyed or made captive, for there was little chance of digging in and establishing a post which could be linked up with the main line.

Cadorna's success had inspired profound uneasiness in the Austrian High Command. All through the Carso battle they had attacked without ceasing in the Kuk and Vodice region, in the vain hope of diverting the Third Army from its purpose. A Council of War was held at Laibach, and an urgent summons for help was sent to Berlin. Guns and troops were hurried from the stagnant Russian front, but they arrived too late to effect much during the course of the battle. In the belief, however, that the new Italian line must be rudimentary and ill-sited, a great counterstroke was determined upon for the first days of June.

It began on 1st June with a heavy bombardment  
*June 1.* of the ridge of Fajti Hrib, and infantry  
attacks on Hill 174 at Tivoli, and the

southern crest of Vodice. These lasted through the next day, and on Sunday, the 3rd, the artillery bombardment covered the whole Carso front from San Marco to Flondar. The *June 3.*

Italian counter-battery work was excellent; but that evening the Austrian guns redoubled their violence, and their infantry gained some ground on the ridge of San Marco, only to lose it under a counter-attack. On the morning of *June 4.*

Monday, the 4th, a great effort was made against Fajti Hrib by two picked *Sturmtruppen* battalions of Hungarian and Tyrolese. They attacked on two sides of a rectangular salient, and won a footing in the Italian positions. Then came the Italian curtain fire on the saddle between Fajti and Hill 464, which cut off the spearhead of the attack from its shaft. By the evening the 215th and 216th Regiments of the Tiber Brigade and the 251st Regiment of the Massa Carrara Brigade had retaken the ground and annihilated the storming party. That same day there was severe fighting farther north on the line between Versic and Jamiano, the southern pivot of the Carso front. The battle swayed with varying fortunes, but the troops of the 61st Division—the 1st and 2nd Regiments of the Sardinian Grenadier Brigade and the Siena and Bari Brigades—finally beat off the enemy, and remained in secure possession of what they had won. South of Jamiano the situation was more difficult. There the new Italian front was strategically badly placed, and in the struggle of the 5th *June 5.* the outposts were driven in, and the right wing of the Third Army forced back from Flondar and from the slopes of Hermada—a loss of from



one-third of a mile to a mile and a quarter on a front of some three miles. This remained the sole Austrian gain from their counterstroke, and it had been won at the expense of heavy losses and by the use of large new reserves. Four fresh divisions from the Russian front were identified during the two days' action.

With the cessation of the Austrian counter-attacks the battle died down on the Julian front. It had cost the enemy 24,000 prisoners and not less than 100,000 in dead and wounded. It had brought the Italians to the true gates of Trieste—the edge of Hermada in the south, and, in the north, of the Bainsizza plateau, which was the key of San Gabriele and San Daniele and the Ternovanerwald. Only those who were intimately familiar with that countryside could realize the enormous strain which such a campaign put upon the endurance of an army. The Julian battles must be short, for flesh and blood could not bear the prolonged agony of the effort demanded. Hence, during the remainder of June, the centre of interest swung northward to the high mountains. In such a history as this, where only broad lines of strategy and major actions can be considered, a thousand brilliant episodes must be left unchronicled. In no part of the European battle-ground were these more frequent than along the intricate front of the Trentino and Cadore. Such were the wonderful achievements in the Primiero district in the summer and autumn of 1916; the fighting around the Drei Zinne in the Cortina Dolomites during April 1917; the struggle for the Tooth of Pasubio during the May offensive; and the achievement of the troops of the

52nd Division in June on the Asiago plateau, where they carried the rock-wall rising from the Val Sugana and known as the Line of Portule, taking a thousand prisoners, and won and held the summit of Monte Ortigara.

Midsummer of 1917 saw the army of Cadorna with a great record behind it, and good hopes for the future. It had failed nowhere. Starting from a position in a high degree precarious and difficult, it had slowly won security for its flanks, and then in well-planned stages had hewn its way towards Trieste. It had resisted, in May 1916, one of the most formidable attacks delivered by the Central Powers. It had shown a genius in fighting natural difficulties which brought many of its achievements into the realms of wild romance. Its *moral* had been superb, and by now it had acquired that mechanical backing without which no army can succeed in modern war. The omens seemed propitious for a final effort which should crumble the last barriers between Italy and the great Austrian seaport. But there were forces at work—dark forces far away from the battle-line—which were destined to frustrate the skill of Cadorna and Cappello and the valour of Alpini and Bersaglieri. The foes of Italy were not only before her gates, but in her own household.

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## CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

### THE PROGRESS OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION.

The Common Features of Revolutions—Differences between the French and Russian Revolutions—Special Elements of Danger in Russia, Political, Economic, and Military—The Russian Character—Impossibility of forming immediately a Constitutional Government—German Propaganda—The Provisional Government—Miliukov declares for a Republic—Guchkov at Riga—The Polish Declaration—The War Cabinet—The Declaration of 9th April—Attitude of the Soviets—Lenin—Austria offers Peace—Stockholm Conference proposed—Soviets interfere with Army Discipline—Guchkov and Miliukov resign—The Coalition Government—Kerenski Minister of War—The Declaration of 19th May—Visits of Allied Delegates—Changes in Army Commands—Kerenski at the Front—The All-Russia Congress of Soviets—The Last Russian Offensive—Military Advantage of the Revolution to the Central Powers—Austro-German Dispositions—Russian Dispositions—Brussilov's Plan—The Attack—Kerenski's Order of the Day—Capture of Koniuchy—Kornilov attacks South of the Dniester—The Capture of Halicz—Capture of Kalusch—The High-water Mark—The Russian *Débâcle*.

BY 16th March the *coup d'état* in Russia was over, and the Revolution itself was beginning its stumbling career. The land was dazed and giddy. Even in the shouts of joy which *March 16.* hailed a new-born freedom there was bewilderment. The people were like men brought suddenly from a dark cell into the glare of a great power-house with its monstrous dynamos. They blessed the light, but walked fearfully and fever-

ishly among strange things. And the light was not clear daylight, but a fantastic artificial glow, which distorted familiar things, and seemed to bring the horizon within a hand's reach.

All revolutions have certain features in common. In all there is the same blotting out of the past, the same confidence that the world can be started anew with a clean sheet. In all there is the same orgy of dishevelled idealism. The first impulse must always be towards peace and universal brotherhood, because bellicosity has been satiated in the destruction of an old *régime*, and the disposition of mankind is not towards eternal strife. It was so at the beginning of the French Revolution, when Wordsworth wrote :—

“ Meantime prophetic harps  
In every grove were ringing ‘ War shall cease ;  
Did ye not hear that conquest is abjured ? ’ ”

In all there is the same dissolution of the structure of society. The future of a revolution depends upon the shaping elements which it may contain of a new discipline. Nature will not tolerate a vacuum. The old must be replaced by the new, and the new must be of the same quality as the old—it must be a discipline which will integrate and direct the nation.

Here lay the fatal weakness of Russia's condition. There was no such discipline, for her Revolution had come not from the burning inspiration of a new faith, but from sheer weariness. She had lost nerve and heart. She was tired in mind and body. It is instructive to remember how different was the case of France. There it had been the movement

of a whole people inspired by a definite creed of life, a people which knew, however crudely, what it wanted, and was determined to achieve certain positive results. In Russia it had been simply an automatic crumbling of old things, and the great mass of the population had no object to strive for. In France the leaders of the Revolution had been essentially Frenchmen, of that stubborn middle-class which can create and continue and provide a force of social persistence. Some of them went mad, like Marat and Robespierre ; but the majority were soldiers, lawyers, and men of affairs who could govern. In Russia there was no such middle-class, and the men who alone had a policy were international anarchists and socialists, whose creed was one of furious negations. Again, her Revolution did not come upon a tired France. It broke down old barriers, and released a flood of energy which naturally fell into military channels. Its law may have been harsh and cruel, but it was a discipline, and presently it took shape in a formidable army. In Russia war weariness made each step in her Revolution lead away from the discipline of soldiers, and that in the midst of a struggle of life and death. Finally, France acquired from her Revolution a sharper consciousness of nationality, but Russia lost the little she possessed. The autocracy had held in formal union elements different in race, speech, religion, and social tradition. With its disappearance the great empire began to split up like the ice on a lake when the binding spell of frost is withdrawn. The ideals of the new leaders were cosmopolitan, and there was no nationalism to set against them.

These general elements of danger—the lack of a powerful guiding class, the absence of any constructive ideals for the new Government, intense war weariness, and an imperfect national integration—were enormously increased by the particular condition of Russia in the spring of 1917. The first difficulty was political. There was no authority, even provisional, which had anything like the assent of the people at large. The shadow Government bequeathed from the old Duma had not the power to make its will effective. The police had gone, the army was in chaos, and therefore it was difficult with the best intentions to use that force without which no Government can endure. Its authority was questioned all over the land by local Soviets, which again had no kind of policy of their own. Any attempt at firm administration roused at once the cry of “reaction,” for order was identified with the vanished autocracy.

The second difficulty was economic. By all the rules of the text-books Russia should long ago have been in economic dissolution ; but in spite of every conceivable blunder, the great natural wealth of the country enabled her to avoid an actual breakdown. But comfort did not exist. The mismanagement of transport, the scandalous “profiteering,” and the corruption of the old Government led to preposterous prices for necessities, and a general irritation and suspicion. Hence the Revolution meant industrial anarchy. The workmen had not the education to pursue any policy like syndicalism ; they were ignorant of the rudiments of economics, and used the situation as a lever to extort fanciful terms, regardless of the effect on their own future. The

result was that production declined steadily, for its cost had become prohibitive. In the three great industrial areas, Petrograd, Moscow, and the Donetz, the supplies on which the army and the civilian population alike depended shrank by 40 per cent. The caprice of the workmen knew no bounds, and the task of an employer of labour became more difficult than that of the man condemned to make ropes of sand. Two instances may be quoted out of many. An English cotton-mill in Petrograd, being faced with a stoppage through non-delivery of material, borrowed some bales from a neighbouring mill; the workmen would not let them be moved. In another Petrograd factory the men, whose wages had been increased threefold, summoned a meeting of the directors. Their delegates explained that they were now getting eight roubles a head more than formerly, and that they considered that they were entitled to this increase for the whole period since the beginning of the war. Eight roubles for five thousand men made 40,000 roubles a day, and 36,000,000 since August 1914. They requested the directors to put this sum in the sacks they had brought within twenty-four hours, or they would deposit the directors in the sacks and throw them into the Neva. The Ministry of Labour managed to persuade the men that their demands were unfair, upon which they withdrew them and apologized. The incident and its termination showed the *naïveté* of the classes who were now the masters of a great country.

The next difficulty was the Army and Navy. Just before the Revolution, in spite of maladministration and chicanery, Russia was better supplied with

munitions of war than at any time since 1914. She had immense numbers of men mobilized—far too many for her immediate needs, so that the depots were crowded with troops whom she could not train, and who would have been far better left in their villages till the need arose. There were regiments in the line which had 15,000 men held in depot. This led to great popular dissatisfaction, and provided excellent material for Maximalist propaganda to work upon. Hence, both on the front where there was no fighting, and in the rear where there was no organization, anarchy spread like wild-fire. In the Navy it was worse. The crews were not peasants, as in the Army, but largely mechanics from the towns, and their long inaction had bred every kind of disorder. The Baltic Fleet became a farce, and the atrocities perpetrated at Kronstadt and on some of the battleships were an ugly blot upon the humane professions of the Revolution. The Black Sea Fleet was better; but, as appeared when the *Breslau* came out, it was grossly inefficient. The Army and Navy, instead of being the last support of order, had become an incalculable factor, a mysterious court of appeal which all parties used in argument, but of which nothing could be confidently predicated. When this fact is realized, it will be seen how hopeless was the task of any Government. It could not use the natural weapons of authority because of the risk that these weapons might break in its hand.

The last and greatest difficulty lay in the Russian character. Readers of the great Russian novelists, notably of Dostoievski, will remember the singular tolerance which is extended to even the basest



types of character. The charity of the writers is infinite and god-like, but it is also inhuman. For the world is conducted by means of certain working definitions of conduct, definitions which may be trivial enough in the eyes of the great Judge of mankind, but without which we cannot live our mortal lives. We are not called upon to usurp the functions of the Almighty, and without our fallible rules we shall wallow in a bog of moral confusion where there is no clear division between right and wrong. This quality of their novelists was likewise a quality of the Russian people. It had its noble and most lovable side, but it could also degenerate into a slack-lipped tolerance which twiddled its thumbs and spoke smooth words in the presence of cruelty and shame. In any case it was no quality for a revolution, which needed a positive creed and a single-hearted energy. The orientalism which is in the Russian nature revealed itself in a curious bonelessness in the presence of urgent needs. The majority cared too little to exert themselves. They were like Leonidas and his sister in Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*, always waiting in the face of desperate crises for something to turn up. They might be willing to die for their faith, but they would not act for it. In such circumstances the power must fall into the hands of those who would stake everything, their own lives and other people's, on the game—the "rash, inconsiderate, fiery volunteers" who had a positive purpose, even if it were only to destroy.

The foregoing considerations will show the immense difficulties in the way of producing in Russia, as the immediate child of the Revolution, any kind

of constitutional Government, and especially a Government still able to continue the war by the Allies' side. Aversion to war was the one feeling shared by the great mass of the Russian people. The Allies had entered the campaign at the call of Russia ; but that Russia had gone, and the new Russia was not inclined to accept its liabilities. Britain and France had been the types of civic freedom to the old Russian Liberals, but these Liberals in the whirligig of change were now regarded as reactionaries, and to the Bolsheviki the constitutionalism of the West seemed indistinguishable from Tsarism and Kaiserism. They sought a headier draught of liberty. The frontiers were open, and German propagandists in different guises were busy among the workmen and soldiers. They had a simple *rôle* to play, for they had only to tell the people what they wanted to hear—that it was folly to fight longer, and that her Western Allies were the true foes of Russia, since they sought to force her to remain in the war. The new Socialist papers, which sprang up in Petrograd like mushrooms in the night, told the same tale. Much German money was spent for the purpose, but it would be wrong to regard all the men who used it as consciously German agents. They acknowledged no country, and would take the money of any one to serve their own international ends. The result was soon apparent not only in the rapid demoralization of the Russian army, but in the hostility which began to grow up to all the Allies, and especially to Britain. It was a tragedy which no forethought could have prevented. It was sometimes urged that it was due to the failure of Allied propaganda, but that charge

was idle. No Allied propaganda could have succeeded where the powerful pro-war parties in Russia failed. The Allies and the Germans in Russia at that moment did not contend on equal terms. The former preached a creed of honour which the people did not wish to hear; the latter preached an acceptable doctrine of self-interest which was supported by the people's leaders.

The opening stage in the true Revolution was that of the Provisional Government, formed to carry on till the meeting of the Constituent Assembly—a stage which lasted exactly two months, from 16th March to 16th May. That Government was composed mainly of men from the Centre and the Right Centre. It contained only one Socialist, Kerenski, and he had already come to rank as a moderate. At first it seemed as if it might succeed. On 23rd

*March*

23-26.

March Miliukov declared for a republic, and so purged himself for the moment of his suspected conservatism. On 26th March Guchkov was at Riga, on a visit to Radko Dmitriev and the Twelfth Army, and reported that the northern front was solid for the continuance of the war. The great army commanders had for the most part accepted the Revolution, and were acclaimed as its leaders. Alexeiev was in supreme command; Ruzsky had the northern group of armies; Brussilov had the southern; a brave and competent soldier, Kornilov, was in command at Petrograd; only Ewarts, the general in charge of the central group, had refused to accept the new *régime*, and Lechitsky had been nominated as his successor. By the first days of April it was reported that discipline

was improving everywhere on the front, and that the first unsettlement had disappeared. On 30th March the Provisional Government issued a proclamation to the Poles, guaranteeing the creation of an independent Polish state, formed of all the territories in which a majority of the population was Polish. "Bound to Russia by a free military union, the Polish state will be a solid rampart against the pressure of the Central Powers on the Slav nations. The Polish nation, liberated and unified, will settle for itself the nature of its own government, expressing its will by means of a Constituent Assembly convoked on the basis of universal suffrage in the capital of Poland."

For the moment, too, the four thousand members of the Petrograd Council of Workmen and Soldiers, the most powerful of the Soviets, were open to reason. They seemed willing to co-operate with Guchkov and Alexeiev in restoring order at the fronts. A War Cabinet was created on the British model, consisting of Prince Lvov, Guchkov, Miliukov, Terestchenko, Shingarev, Nekrasov, and Kerenski, which kept in close touch with general headquarters. On 9th April the Prime Minister issued a proclamation setting forth the views of the Provisional Government:—

"The Government deems it to be its right and duty to declare that free Russia does not aim at dominating other nations, at depriving them of their national patrimony, or at occupying by force foreign territories; but that its object is to establish a durable peace on the basis of the rights of nations to decide their own destiny.

"The Russian nation does not lust after the strengthening of its power abroad at the expense of other nations. Its aim is not to subjugate or to humiliate any one.

"In the name of the higher principles of justice it has removed the chains which weighed upon the Polish people.

"But the Russian nation will not allow its Fatherland to come out of the great struggle humiliated and weakened in its vital forces.

"These principles will constitute the basis of the foreign policy of the Provisional Government, which will carry out unfailingly the popular will and safeguard the rights of our Fatherland, while observing the engagements entered into with our Allies.

"The Provisional Government of Free Russia has no right to hide the truth. The State is in danger. Every effort must be made to save it. Let the country respond to the truth when it is told, not by sterile depression, not by discouragement, but by single-hearted vigour, with a view to the creation of a united national will. This will give us new strength for the struggle and win us salvation."

This sane and loyal creed was emphasized three days later by Brussilov, in command of the Armies of the South, who told the Soviets that, much as he esteemed their work for liberty, they must not presume to give orders to the troops, or to insist that officers should be chosen by the soldiers like candidates for Parliament. "Such a thing has never been seen. It is known in no army in the whole world. If it were, it would not be an army, but a mob."

On 13th April there came the first meeting of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets. It revealed a

*April 13.* curiously fluid state of opinion. Annexations and indemnities were renounced, but the questions of Belgium, Poland, Serbia, and Armenia were ruled by the majority to lie outside the formula. On the whole, opinion was for the continuance of the war, provided it was waged on their own terms; but it was speedily revealed that these terms were impracticable. The majority fol-

lowed the Minimalists, like Skobelev and the two Georgians, Tseretelli and Tcheidze, in demanding that the Allies should at once fall into line with their views on war policy, and that, in the event of the Central Powers standing out, the war should continue. But there was also a general refusal to sanction those steps as to the maintenance of authority which alone would make a campaign possible. The minority, led by Lenin and his Bolsheviki, demanded an immediate cessation of hostilities, since in their view the enemies of the Revolution were not the Central Powers, but the capitalists and *bourgeoisie* in all countries, and not least the then Provisional Government of Russia.

A word must be said about the mysterious figure of Lenin, soon to become a household word in Europe. His true name was Vladimir Iljetch Uljanov,\* a scion of a noble house in the Simbirsk district, who, after his elder brother's death on the gallows for complicity in a Nihilist plot, had become an active leader in revolutionary propaganda. From 1900 onwards he was in Switzerland, where he created the extreme left wing of the Social Democrats. From 1905 to 1907 he was in Russia, where he found the reform party not yet ripe for his intransigence. His chance did not come till the outbreak of the Revolution, when he was permitted by the German Government to journey overland from Switzerland to Petrograd. He was in his own way the most consistent politician alive, for he had never wavered from the creed of destruction which he had formulated at seventeen, and now at the age of

\* "Lenin" was the journalistic *nom-de-plume* by which he was best known among his fellow Socialists.

forty-six he was given the chance to put it into practice. He accepted German assistance and German gold, but he had as little love for the Hohenzollerns as he had for the Romanovs. He held his sombre faith with the passion of a dervish, and, without sense of humour or proportion, set about rebuilding the world after his crude patterns. But in the nature of things he could not live to see the new structure ; his part, therefore, must be to destroy the old social system everywhere, that the poor and oppressed might at least be free of their taskmasters. Such a creed was not without a sombre greatness, and beyond doubt Lenin was a single-hearted fanatic, without fear or self-seeking, merciful and gentle in the common relations of life, but pitiless in the service of his cause. He knew that for him there was no hope : sooner or later he would go down in the ruins that he had made ; but he was content if those who came after him to carry the last fort should find his body by the wall.

The intransigence of Lenin and his following, and the impracticable theorizing of even the moderate members of the Soviets, had more popular appeal than the wisdom of the Ministers. The first demanded peace and then democracy ; the second cried for democracy and then peace ; the third called for victory, then democracy—and both peace and democracy were more pleasing aims than that victory which demanded a new resolution and a continued struggle. To help this natural bias the Central Powers summoned all their resources. We have seen that German agents were at work from the first days of the Revolution in every factory and on every front—doves of pacificism, who, like

those of the Psalmist, emerged from among the pots with silver and gold in their wings. On 15th April Austria offered peace, and, though the offer was refused, it convinced the Russian masses that the enemy was becoming infected by their own spirit. More adroit still was the next move, for Berlin and Vienna, Budapest and Sofia mobilized their tame Socialists, and approved of a conference at Stockholm\* for the summer, where it was hoped the Russian delegates would be entangled in a maze of theoretical discussions, and the plain issues of the war hopelessly obscured. The hapless Provisional Government had a task too hard for mortal statecraft.

From the first days of May it became clear that it was losing ground. Miliukov, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed a Note to the Allies, proclaiming the resolve of Russia to conclude no separate peace, but to carry the war to a victorious end. Something in the wording annoyed the Soviets, and the streets of Petrograd were filled with processions carrying banners inscribed with the demand for Miliukov's downfall. The majority of the Soviets were busy making appeals to the soldiers

\* The invitation to the Stockholm Conference was issued early in April by various Dutch Socialists, who had been co-opted on to the executive of the *Internationale* when it was transferred from Brussels to the Hague after the outbreak of war. Their action was not approved by the Belgian leaders, who constituted the original executive, and M. Vandervelde formally dissociated himself from the scheme. On the other hand, M. Camille Huysmans, the Belgian secretary of the *Internationale*, accompanied the Dutch Socialists to Stockholm. On 23rd May the Dutch-Scandinavian Standing Committee was formed, with Huysmans as secretary and Branting as president.



not to fraternize with the enemy, and pointing out the impossibility of a separate peace ; but by their interference with normal discipline they took the best way of destroying the Army. They insisted, among other things, that the functions of the officers were limited to issuing military commands, and that all other matters, including discipline, must be left to company or regimental committees where the

*May 13.* private soldiers were in a majority. On 13th May Guchkov resigned, since he could not be responsible for an army under such conditions. A day or two later Miliukov followed. He had uncompromisingly announced that Russia must have Constantinople, which, apparently, the new Russia did not want. He had stated Russia's obligations to her Allies with a candour which seemed to the Soviets to smack of Imperialism—a term under which they lumped everything, good, bad, and indifferent, that had any affiliation with the old world.

It was clear that the Provisional Government had now broken down, and must be replaced by a coalition on a wider basis, including more members

*May 16.* of the Left. On 16th May a conference took place with the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, and an agreement was arrived at on policy, the two main points being the unity of all the Allied fronts, and the necessity of combating anarchy. As a result several prominent members of the Left entered the Cabinet. Prince Lvov remained Prime Minister, and Shingarev, Nekrasov, Konovalov, Godnev, Manuilov, and Vladimir Lvov retained their old portfolios. Terestchenko succeeded Miliukov as Foreign Minister,

and Tchernov, a Social Revolutionary and the leader of the Peasants' Party, became Minister of Agriculture. Skobelev and Tseretelli, two prominent Minimalists, went respectively to the departments of Labour and Posts and Telegraphs, and Pieshekhanov, another Socialist, took charge of Food Supply. Most significant change of all, Kerenski became Minister of War.

The new Coalition Government marked its advent to office by the issue, on 19th May, of a declaration of policy, confirming and elaborating the manifesto of 9th April. It was *May 19.* drafted in consultation between the Ministry and the Soviets:—

“The Provisional Government, reorganized and reinforced by representatives of the Revolutionary Democracy, declares that it will energetically carry into effect the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity beneath the standards of which the great Russian Revolution came to birth.

“The Provisional Government is united as to the fundamental lines of its future action, as follows:—

“1. In its foreign policy the Provisional Government, rejecting, in concert with the entire people, all thought of a separate peace, adopts openly as its aim the re-establishment of a general peace which shall not tend towards either domination over other nations, or the seizure of their national possessions, or the violent usurpation of their territories—a peace without annexations or indemnities, and based on the rights of nations to decide their own affairs.

“In the firm conviction that the fall of the *régime* of Tsardom in Russia and the consolidation of democratic principles in our internal and external policy will create in the Allied democracies new aspirations towards a stable peace and the brotherhood of nations, the Provisional Government will take steps towards bringing about an agreement with the Allies on the basis of its declaration of 9th April.

“2. Convinced that the defeat of Russia and her Allies would not only be a source of the greatest calamities to the

people, but would postpone or make impossible the conclusion of a world-wide peace on the basis indicated above, the Provisional Government believes firmly that the Russian Revolutionary Army will not suffer the German troops to destroy our Western Allies and then throw themselves upon us with the full force of their arms.

"The development of the principles of democratization in the Army and the development of its military power, both offensive and defensive, will constitute the most important task of the Provisional Government.

"3. The Provisional Government will fight resolutely and inflexibly against the economic disorganization of the country by the systematic establishment of Governmental control of the production, transport, exchange, and distribution of commodities, and in necessary cases it will have recourse also to the organization of production.

"4. Measures for the protection of labour in every possible way will continue to be promoted further with energy.

"5. Leaving it to the Constituent Assembly to deal with the question of transferring land to the workers, and proceeding with preparatory measures relative thereto, the Provisional Government will take all necessary steps towards ensuring the greatest possible production of the cereals required by the country and towards furthering the systematic utilization of the soil in the interests of the national economy and of the working classes.

"6. Looking forward to the introduction of a series of reforms of the financial system upon a democratic basis, the Provisional Government will devote particular attention to the increasing of direct taxes on the wealthy classes—succession duties, taxes on excessive war profits, a property tax, etc.

"7. Efforts to introduce and develop democratic units of self-government will be continued with all possible speed and assiduity.

"8. The Provisional Government will also make all possible efforts to bring about, at the earliest date practicable, the calling together of a Constituent Assembly in Petrograd.

"Resolutely adopting as its aim the realization of the programme indicated above, the Provisional Government declares categorically that fruitful work is possible only if it has the full and absolute confidence of the entire revolutionary people and the means of exercising to the utmost the powers

essential to the confirmation of the victories of the Revolution and to their further development.

"Addressing to all citizens a firm and urgent appeal for the safeguarding of the unity of power in the hands of the Provisional Government, the latter declares that, for the safety of the country, it will take the most energetic measures against all attempts at a counter-revolution, as well as against all anarchical, illegal, or violent acts calculated to disorganize the country and to prepare the ground for a counter-revolution.

"The Provisional Government believes that, thus proceeding, it will have the firm support of all those to whom the freedom of Russia is dear."

This manifesto was answered cordially and sympathetically by the different Allied Governments, answers which were chillily received by the Soviets and their press. The Allies, moreover, sent special missions to Russia to establish with the new *régime* relations which could scarcely be effected by the formal channels of diplomacy. M. Albert Thomas came from France, M. Vandervelde from Belgium, Senator Root from America, and Mr. Arthur Henderson from Britain. These trained and capable observers found before them a problem which defied easy definition. All parties seemed in a state of flux, the country was seething with that expansive type of speculation which is often miscalled idealism, and of the condition and future of the armies no man, least of all their generals, could speak with certainty. The High Commands were in the melting-pot. Alexeiev retired early in June, and was succeeded by Brussilov, who was followed in the command of the southern group by General Gutor. Kornilov had resigned his Governorship of Petrograd. Gourko had replaced Ewarts with the central group, and he now asked to be relieved of his

command. He was succeeded by General Denikin. In these days Kerenski did a marvellous work. He was convinced that an immediate offensive was necessary to tighten the discipline and restore the *moral* of the armies, and he flew from front to front, exhorting, upbraiding, inspiring. With his hoarse voice and burning eyes he was the kind of figure to inspire the wildest audience, and his lightning campaign worked wonders among the troops. By the middle of June Brussilov reported that the Russian forces were fast recovering from their green-sickness. Kerenski did more, for he succeeded in instilling the spirit of the offensive even into large sections of the Socialist parties. For a little they seemed to shake off the spell of Lenin and his friends, and to be tending towards the view that victory in the field could alone safeguard the Revolution.

But during the month of June it was becoming very clear that the decorous Socialists from the Western nations, M. Thomas, M. Vandervelde, and Mr. Henderson, were making no headway. They were classed as "Imperialists" by the majority of the Soviets. The idea of the Stockholm Conference had grown apace, and the essence of that scheme was a re-creation of the bankrupt *Internationale*. The net spread by Berlin was plain enough, but Russian Socialism was too drunken with the new wine of dogma to be wary. They had no further concern with the Alliance, which had been devised by militarists and imperialists; they thought in terms not of nations but of classes; the causes for which the war had been undertaken now seemed to them a tale of little meaning. Hence they would

not distinguish between men of their own persuasion in Allied and in enemy countries. "We expect," they told the Western delegates, "of the conference of Socialists of belligerent and neutral countries the creation of an *Internationale*, which will permit the working classes of the whole world to struggle in concert for the general peace, and to break the bonds which unite them by force to Governments and classes imbued with Imperialist tendencies which prevent peace. . . . We consider that the conference can only succeed if Socialists regard themselves not as representatives of the two belligerent parties, but as representatives of a single movement of the working classes towards the common aim of general peace." The difficulty was that, whatever might be the views of Russia and her Allies, these were not the views of the Central Powers. The delegates of Berlin and Vienna, with a Government brief in their pocket, were already moving on Stockholm.

On 16th June the All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened in Petrograd under the presidency of Tcheidze. The Swiss Zimmerwaldian, Robert Grimm, had already been ex- *June 16.* pelled from Russia, and the first act of the Congress was a triumph for the party of order—a ratification of the expulsion by 640 votes to 120. Lenin delivered a furious attack upon the Coalition Ministry, and especially upon Kerenski. He was answered by Skobelev and Tseretelli, the latter of whom had become the leader of the saner elements in the Soviets. "We desire," they said, "to hasten the conclusion of a new treaty in which the principles proclaimed by the Russian democracy will be recognized as the basis of the international policy of

the Allies. A separate peace is impossible. Such a peace would bring Russia into a new war on the side of the German coalition, and would mean leaving one coalition only to enter into another." They explained that the Russian Government were taking steps to summon an inter-Allied Conference for the revision of treaties, always excepting the London agreement under which all the Allies had pledged themselves not to conclude a separate peace. Then came weighty reports from the different Socialist Ministers. Kerenski gave an account of his visits to the front. Pieshekhanov urged the gravity of the food question. Even Tchernov, not usually addicted to moderation, warned his hearers that they must proceed by cautious steps, for Socialism could not be achieved in a day. A resolution was carried to dissolve the Duma, since at a meeting a few days earlier Miliukov and Rodzianko had cast contempt upon internationalism. On the whole the Congress behaved discreetly, and gave honest support to the Ministry on the greater matters.

But the debates made it very clear how brittle was the whole machinery of government. Even when Soviets and Ministry were agreed, it seemed impossible to use force against disorder. The session was constantly interrupted by the necessity of dealing with a preposterous incident in Petrograd. A group of Leninites, armed with machine guns, took possession of a house in the suburbs, and "held up" the neighbourhood. They declared that they were only exercising legitimate political activities, and the militia sent to expel them promptly fraternized with them. Neither Congress nor Ministry could do anything, and the resolutions in favour of the restoration of

order were ironically punctuated by the processions of the anarchists from their suburban fortress. The Leninites remained undisturbed until, on 1st July, came the news of the Galician offensive. Then self-confidence awoke in the Government, the house was surrounded, and the garrison marched off to the prison below the Winter Palace. It was an instructive commentary upon the situation. The Government depended wholly upon fleeting waves of public opinion; normally that opinion was against any use of force, but it occasionally hardened, and then drastic measures would be taken. It provided the answer to those critics who clamoured for Lvov or Kerenski to use the strong hand. After the golden chance of the first two days of the *coup d'état* had been missed, the strong hand would have tumbled the last precarious remnants of national order into chaos.

Kerenski had his will, and the Russian armies made one last attempt at a serious offensive. Except for a local attack on the Stokhod in the first week of April, the enemy had made no effort to reap in the field for his own advantage the harvest of the Revolution. He was too wary to do anything that might weld the disunited forces of Russia once more into a nation. Rather he chose to encourage anarchy by inaction, and his offensive lay in the workshops of Petrograd and Moscow, and in the debating societies along the Russian front. But the Revolution had given him immediate military gains. Germany, though she still maintained some seventy-six divisions in the East, had been able to skim them for her "shock-troops," and to use



that front as a rest-camp for units sorely battered in the West. Austria had removed to the Isonzo whole divisions and a great number of batteries to resist Cadorna's assaults in May and June. The Central Powers had made up their minds that for the moment there was no fear of a Russian offensive, and the long line from the Baltic to the Carpathians was loosely held. But they had it in their power to bring up reserves speedily in case of danger, for they had communications still working well, while those of Russia shared in the general confusion of the Revolution. The enemy dispositions on the front were much the same as they had been at the close of 1916. The German group, under Prince Leopold of Bavaria, extended from the Baltic to just south of Brzezany, and its right wing was formed by the Austrian Second Army, under Boehm-Ermolli. The Austrian group, now under the Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, filled the gap between it and von Mackensen's Rumanian command. Its left wing, in front of Halicz and astride the Dniester, was the Austro-German army, under Count Bothmer.

The Russian front in Galicia ran west of Brody and east of Brzezany and Halicz ; across the Dniester it just covered Stanislaw, which had been the limit of Lechitsky's advance the previous August. From Brody south to the neighbourhood of Zborov lay the Eleventh Army, which had once been Sakharov's and was now under General Erdelli. South of it to the Dniester was the Seventh Army, which Scherbachev had commanded in 1916. Scherbachev was now on the Rumanian front, and his place was taken by General Tcheremisov. Between the Dniester and the Carpathians Lechitsky's old Ninth Army

had given place to the Eighth Army, which Kaledin had led in 1916 on the Styra. Its new commander was Kornilov, aforetime military Governor of Petrograd, a little square man like a Kirghiz Cossack, whose escape from an Austrian prison and wild journey across Hungary to Bucharest had made him a popular hero when Russia had still an ear for gallant tales. When Brussilov became Commander-in-Chief he had handed over the charge of the southern group of armies to General Gutor, but he himself supervised every detail of the coming offensive. For it he had collected all the best fighting material that Russia could produce. He had the pick of the Finnish, Caucasian, and Siberian regiments; he had the cream of the Cossack cavalry; and he had by way of "shock-troops" some of those strange "battalions of death" who were vowed to perish to a man rather than surrender. He was well aware that he was making a gambler's throw. He could not hope to find reserves of the same quality when his picked troops were depleted. He had a chaotic hinterland behind him, where the transport must needs be ragged, and in Kiev people were thinking more of dividing up the land and winning independence for the Ukraine than of the enemy at their gates. But there was just the chance that a brilliant success and an example of gallantry and devotion might bring the tides of unrest into ordered channels, and shame the faint-hearts into resolution. Kerenski was with the troops in the uniform of a private soldier, labouring to put his own fire into their hearts. And somewhere among the battalions, serving as a junior officer, was Guchkov, once Minister of War.

Brussilov's plan was to strike for the nearest place of importance in enemy hands, and this he found in the nodal point of Lemberg. His strategy was ingenious. A frontal attack upon Lemberg from the direction of Brody, along the high ground forming the watershed between the Dniester and the Bug, was out of the question, for there the enemy had his strongest defences. If he sought to outflank them on the south he was faced with the long river-cañons which run to the Dniester, shallow at their source, but deep-cut and marshy nearer their confluence with the main stream. Brussilov's plan was to make the attempt in the Brzezany sector with the Seventh Army, and then to draw the Eleventh into the battle, as if he were about to extend his operations to the north. When he had thus puzzled the enemy, he proposed to fling in Kaledin's Eighth Army on the south bank of the Dniester against Halicz, and ultimately, if things prospered, against the vital point of Stryj, which would mean the outflanking of Lemberg. The sector for the first attack was some eighteen miles long, from Zborov, on the Strypa, along the east bank of the Tseniovka to its junction with the Zlota Lipa at the village of Potutory. Here the enemy's position defended the important point of Brzezany, through which ran the lateral railway that fed his front. The country was one of steep, wooded ridges, and around Koniuchy was a large tract of forest. It was the district where in the preceding September the right wing of Scherbachev's Seventh Army had struggled in vain. It was now held by the enemy with ten divisions—three Austrian, the 32nd, 38th Honved, and 54th, in front of Koniuchy ;

the 19th and 20th Turkish before Brzezany; and five German divisions thence to the Dniester.

The artillery "preparation" began at 4.40 a.m. on the morning of Friday, 29th June. All next day the bombardment continued, and during the morning of Sunday, 1st July, till just *June 29-*  
after noon the infantry of the Seventh *July 1.* Army crossed the parapets. Kerenski had already issued a stirring order of the day:—

"Soldiers! The country is in danger. Catastrophe threatens liberty and the Revolution. It is time for the Army to be up and doing. Your Commander-in-Chief, who is so well acquainted with victory, reckons that every day of further delay strengthens the enemy, and that only a decisive blow can destroy his plans. . . . Let all peoples know that it is not from weakness that we speak of peace. Let them know that liberty has made our military power still greater. Officers and soldiers, know that all Russia blesses your exploits. In the name of liberty, in the name of the future of our country, in the name of an honourable and stable peace, I order you 'Forward!'"

It was indeed the hour of crisis in the history of the Revolution, and for a fortnight it seemed as if Kerenski had succeeded, and the Revolutionary armies of Russia had proved their prowess beyond question. That first day the Austrian lines crumbled. By the evening Koniuchy was taken and three trench systems, and the Tseniovka was crossed. *July 2.* Next day the attack was resumed, and Potutory, at the mouth of the Tseniovka, fell, while the passage of the Zlota Lipa was forced south of Brzezany. By that evening there had fallen to the Russians 18,000 prisoners, 300 officers, and twenty-nine guns.

Next day, the Eleventh Army was in action north

of the Tarnopol-Lemberg railway, and the heights west and south-west of Zborov were captured.

*July 3.* British and Belgian armoured cars played a gallant part in these operations, for the weather was dry, and on the high ridges the ground was passable. On 3rd and 4th July came the enemy counter-attacks, feeble as yet, for the Austrian and Turkish divisions had been caught napping, and fresh reserves had not yet arrived. The Seventh Army was pressing direct on Brzezany, and the Eleventh Army operating between Koniuchy and Zborov. The blow had been delivered at the junction of the German and Austrian group commands, and the activity of the Eleventh Army seemed to presage a new movement against the main Lemberg front. Thither the reserves were hurried, and nothing was done to strengthen the line south of the Dniester.

While the struggle raged on the Zlota Lipa there began on Saturday, 7th July, a bombardment

*July 7.* by Kornilov's Eighth Army on a sector of some ten miles from the Dniester below Jezupol southward along the sandy loops of the Black Bistritza. Here lay the Fourth Austrian Army, under General von Tersztyansky. At noon on

*July 8.* Sunday, 8th July, the Russian infantry attacked, and the result was a serious breach in the enemy's line. Kornilov carried the whole western bank of the Black Bistritza, took the town of Jezupol with its bridge, and the villages of Stary Lysiec, Rybno, Pavelcze, and Ciezov. This brought them to the wooded slopes of the Czarny Las, over which the Cossacks pursued the fleeing Austrians for eight miles, as far as the river Lukwa,

which enters the Dniester just below Halicz. The booty of the day was 131 officers, 7,000 rank and file, and forty-eight guns, including twelve heavy guns. Next day the enemy fell back to the Lomnica, and 1,000 more prisoners were taken. Halicz, which covered Bothmer's right, was now in danger of being outflanked from the south, while it was being assaulted from the east. *July 9.*

At midday on Tuesday, 10th July, Halicz fell to a joint attack by Kornilov's right and Tcheremissof's left, and 2,000 prisoners were taken. At least two German divisions had been hurried down from Bothmer's command, but they failed to stem the tide. The Austrian 15th Division had lost two-thirds of its strength; the German 83rd had lost half. Meantime Kornilov was across the Lomnica, and next day he entered the town of Kalusch, west of that stream. This was the high-water mark of Brussilov's success. Stryj was the next objective, and at Kalusch Kornilov had already covered half the distance between it and Stanislau. If Stryj fell, Bothmer's line on the Brzezany ridge must follow. It would not give Lemberg at once to the Russians, but it would compel the evacuation of by far the strongest of Lemberg's defences. *July 11.*

But the impetus of the Revolutionary armies had been exhausted. The picked battalions had done their work, and had paid the penalty. The ordinary units were weakened by desertion and long indiscipline; the communications were bad; the hinterland of the armies was disorganized; and though the delegates of the Soldiers' Committees had often

led their men gallantly into action, ardour could not fill the place of orderly training. Moreover, the enemy had recovered from his first surprise. He had got his reserves up, and had twice recovered Kalusch, only to lose it when the deadly Russian bayonets came into play. The weather broke, the floods rose, and all three Russian armies found their movements checked. Kornilov during a week of swaying battles struggled gallantly on. His front was a sharp salient, and he strove to broaden it by winning the left bank of the Upper Lomnica towards the Carpathians. But on the *July 16.* 16th he was compelled to evacuate Kalusch, and retire everywhere to the right bank of the stream.

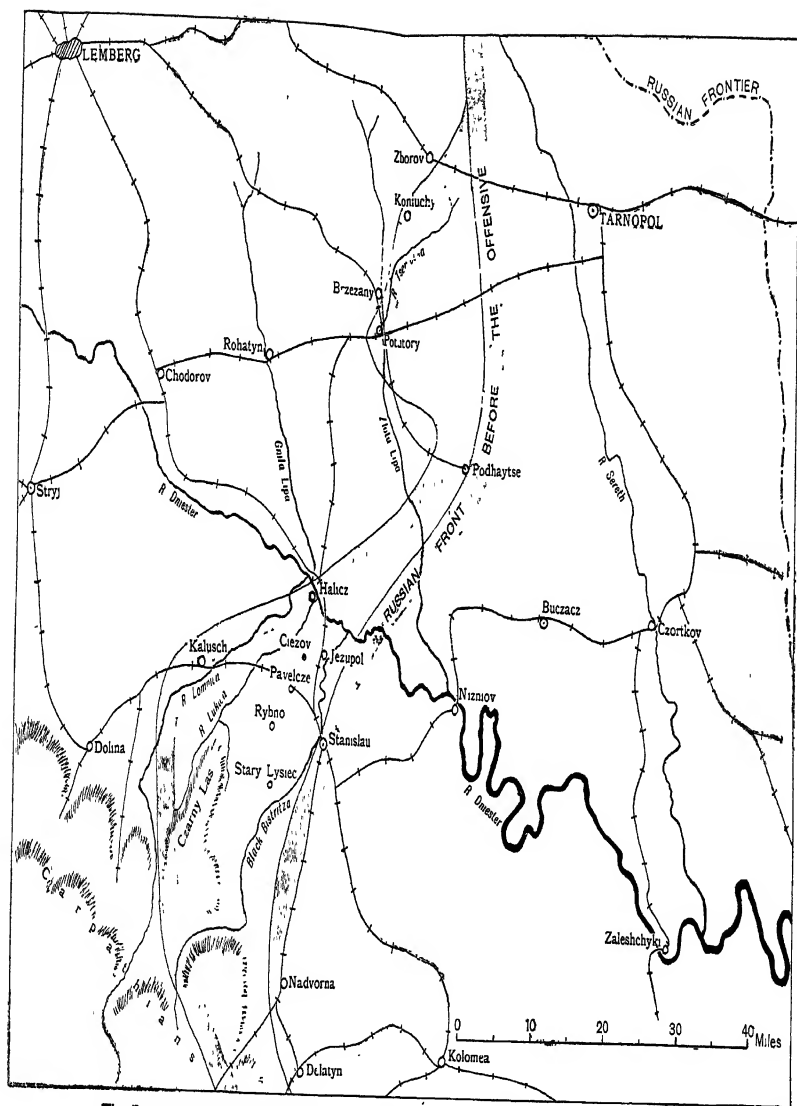
That was the day of the Leninite outbreak in Petrograd. Kerenski had already left the front and gone to Kiev to debate Ukrainian independence with

*July 20.* the patriots of Little Russia. On the 20th he hastened back to Petrograd to deal with the disorders of the capital. The day

*July 19.* before had come the Austro-German *revanche*. The main threat was against the Eleventh Army in the region between the upper streams of the Sereth and the Zlota Lipa. It was not made in any great force, or attended by any mighty bombardment ; it had no other aim than to relieve the stress south of the Dniester ; it succeeded not of its own strength, but because canker had ruined the defence. At ten o'clock on the morning of that day the 607th Regiment simply abandoned their position. The rot spread, and before the evening the whole front was a rabble. A gap twenty-five miles wide was created, through which







The Russian Offensive in July 1917, showing the Russian front before the advance, and the line reached when the retreat began.





the enemy streamed. Next day, Friday, the 20th, the mischief continued, and the *débâcle* of the Eleventh Army compelled the retirement of the Seventh and Eighth. By Saturday evening the German horse were in the streets of Tarnopol; by Sunday the enemy had advanced his front thirty miles; and by Monday Tarnopol was securely in his hands. The gains of 1916 in Galicia had been wiped out in a day. July 20.  
July 21-23.

Let the telegram sent to Kerenski by the Commissary and Committees of the Eleventh Army record the tragic facts :—

“A fatal crisis has occurred in the *moral* of the troops recently sent forward against the enemy by the heroic efforts of the conscientious minority. Most of the military units are in a state of complete disorganization. Their spirit for an offensive has utterly disappeared, and they no longer listen to the orders of their leaders, and neglect all the exhortations of their comrades, even replying to them by threats and shots. Some elements voluntarily evacuate their positions without even waiting for the approach of the enemy. Cases are on record in which an order to proceed with all haste to such and such a spot to assist comrades in distress has been discussed for several hours at meetings, and the reinforcements consequently delayed for several hours. . . . For a distance of several hundred versts long files of deserters, both armed and unarmed men, who are in good health and robust, but who have utterly lost all shame, are proceeding to the rear of the army. Frequently entire units desert in this manner. . . . We unanimously recognize that the situation demands extreme measures and extreme efforts, for everything must be risked to save the Revolution from catastrophe. Orders have been given to-day to fire upon deserters and runaways. Let the Government find courage to shoot those who by their cowardice are selling Russia and the Revolution.”

The tale is too pitiful to linger over. The

brethren of the men who had conquered at Rava Russka and Przasnysz, who had carried out the greatest retreat in all history, who had fought with clubs and fists and sword-bayonets when they had no rifles—whose resolution no weight of artillery could daunt, and whose ardour no privations could weaken—who had come in their simple hardihood to the pinnacle of human greatness—had now sunk into a mob of selfish madmen, forgetful of their old virtues, and babbling of uncomprehended pedantries. Most pitiful was the case of those who still remained true to their salt, and were murdered or trodden down by the panic-stricken horde, and of the officers, who loved their men like children, and saw their life's work ruined, and themselves engulfed in a common shame. No great deed, it is true, can wholly fail. The exploits of Russia during the first years of war can never die. Their memory must surely revive to be a treasure and an inspiration for the Russia yet to be. But at the moment to Brusilov and his heart-broken captains, striving during those awful July days to stay the rout in the Galician valleys, it seemed that a horror of great darkness had fallen upon the world, and that the best life-blood of their country had been idly shed.

“ Even so was wisdom proven blind,  
So courage failed, so strength was chained ;  
Even so the gods, whose seeing mind  
Is not as ours, ordained.”

## APPENDIX I.

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### THE GERMAN RETREAT IN THE WEST.

#### SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S THIRD DISPATCH.

GENERAL HEAD QUARTERS,  
BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE,  
31st May 1917.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit the following Report on the operations of the British Armies in France from the 18th November 1916 to the commencement of our present offensive.

#### NATURE OF OPERATIONS.

(1) My plans for the winter, already decided on at the opening of the period under review, were based on several considerations :—

The enemy's strength had been considerably reduced by the severe and protracted struggle on the Somme battlefields, and so far as circumstances and the weather would permit it was most desirable to allow him no respite during the winter.

With this object, although possibilities were limited by the state of the ground under winter conditions, I considered it feasible to turn to good account the very favourable situation then existing in the region of the River Ancre as a result of the Somme battle.

Our operations prior to the 18th November 1916 had forced the enemy into a very pronounced salient in the area

between the Ancre and the Scarpe Valleys, and had obtained for us greatly improved opportunities for observation over this salient. A comparatively short further advance would give us complete possession of the few points south of the Ancre to which the enemy still clung, and would enable us to gain entire command of the spur above Beaumont Hamel. Thereafter, the configuration of the ground in the neighbourhood of the Ancre Valley was such that every fresh advance would enfilade the enemy's positions and automatically open up to the observation of our troops some new part of his defences. Arrangements could therefore be made for systematic and deliberate attacks to be delivered on selected positions, to gain further observation for ourselves and deprive the enemy of that advantage. By these means the enemy's defences would be continually outflanked, and we should be enabled to direct our massed artillery fire with such accuracy against his trenches and communications as to make his positions in the Ancre Valley exceedingly costly to maintain.

With the same object in view a number of minor enterprises and raids were planned to be carried out along the whole front of the British Armies.

In addition to the operations outlined above, preparations for the resumption of a general offensive in the spring had to be proceeded with in due course. In this connection, steps had to be taken to overcome the difficulties which a temporary lack of railway facilities would place in the way of completing our task within the allotted time. Provision had also to be made to cope with the effect of winter conditions upon work and roads, a factor to which the prolonged frost at the commencement of the present year subsequently gave especial prominence.

Another very important consideration was the training of the forces under my command. It was highly desirable that during the winter the troops engaged in the recent prolonged fighting should be given an adequate period out of the line for training, rest, and refitting.

Certain modifications of my programme in this respect eventually became necessary. To meet the wishes of our Allies in connection with the plan of operations for the spring of 1917, a gradual extension of the British front southwards as far as a point opposite the town of Roye was decided on in January, and was completed without incident of importance by the 26th February 1917. This alteration entailed the maintenance by British forces of an exceptionally active front of 110 miles, including the whole of the Somme battle front, and combined with the continued activity maintained throughout the winter interfered to no small extent with my arrangements for reliefs. The training of the troops had consequently to be restricted to such limited opportunities as circumstances from time to time permitted.

The operations on the Ancre, however, as well as the minor enterprises and raids to which reference has been made, were carried out as intended. Besides gaining valuable position and observation by local attacks in the neighbourhood of Bouchavesnes, Sailly-Saillisel, and Grandcourt, these raids and minor enterprises were the means of inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, and contributed very appreciably to the total of 5,284 prisoners taken from him in the period under review.

#### OPERATIONS ON THE ANCRE.

##### *The Enemy's Position.*

(2) At the conclusion of the operations of the 13th November and following days the enemy still held the whole of the Ancre Valley from Le Transloy to Grandcourt, and his first line of defence lay along the lower northern slopes of the Thiepval Ridge.

North of the Ancre, he still held the greater part of the spur above Beaumont Hamel. Beyond that point the original German front line, in which the enemy had established himself two years previously, ran past Serre, Gommecourt and Monchy-au-Bois to the northern slopes of the main water-



shed, and then north-east down to the valley of the River Scarpe east of Arras.

Besides the positions held by him on our immediate front, and in addition to the fortified villages of the Ancre Valley with their connecting trenches, the enemy had prepared along the forward crest of the ridge north of the Ancre Valley a strong second system of defence. This consisted of a double line of trenches, heavily wired, and ran north-west from Sail-lisel past Le Transloy to the Albert-Bapaume Road, where it turned west past Grevillers and Loupart Wood and then north-west again past Achiet-le-Petit to Bucquoy. This system, which was known as the Le Transloy-Loupart line, both by reason of its situation and as a result of the skill and industry expended on its preparation, constituted an exceedingly strong natural defensive position, second only to that from which the enemy had recently been driven on the Morval-Thiepval Ridge. Parallel to this line, but on the far side of the crest, he had constructed towards the close of the past year a third defensive system on the line Rocquigny, Bapaume, Ablainzevelle.

### *Operations commenced.*

(3) The first object of our operations in the Ancre Valley was to advance our trenches to within assaulting distance of the Le Transloy-Loupart line.

Accordingly, on the 18th November 1916, before the rapidly deteriorating condition of the ground had yet made an undertaking on so considerable a scale impossible, an attack was delivered against the next German line of defence, overlooking the villages of Pys and Grandcourt. Valuable positions were gained on a front of about 5,000 yards, while a simultaneous attack north of the Ancre considerably improved the situation of our troops in the Beaucourt Valley.

By this time winter conditions had set in, and along a great part of our new front movement across the open had become practically impossible. During the remainder of the

month, therefore, and throughout December, our energies were principally directed to the improvement of our own trenches and of roads and communications behind them. At the same time the necessary rearrangement of our artillery was completed, so as to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by our new positions for concentration of fire.

*The Beaumont Hamel Spur.*

(4) As soon as active operations again became possible, proceedings were commenced to drive the enemy from the remainder of the Beaumont Hamel Spur. In January a number of small operations were carried out with this object, resulting in a progressive improvement of our position. Before the end of the month the whole of the high ground north and east of Beaumont Hamel was in our possession; we had pushed across the Beaucourt Valley 1,000 yards north of Beaucourt Village, and had gained a footing on the southern slopes of the spur to the east.

The most important of these attacks was undertaken at dawn on the morning of the 11th January against a system of hostile trenches extending for some 1,500 yards along the crest of the spur east and north-east of Beaumont Hamel. By 8.30 a.m. all our objectives had been captured, together with over 200 prisoners. That afternoon an enemy counter-attack was broken up by our artillery.

Throughout the whole of the month's fighting in this area, in which over 500 German prisoners were taken by us, our casualties were exceedingly light. This satisfactory circumstance can be attributed mainly to the close and skilful co-operation between our infantry and artillery, and to the excellence of our artillery preparation and barrages. These in turn were made possible by the opportunities for accurate observation afforded by the high ground north of Thiepval and by the fine work done by our aircraft.

*Grandcourt.*

(5) Possession of the Beaumont Hamel Spur opened up a new and extensive field of action for our artillery. The whole of the Beaucourt Valley and the western slopes of the spur beyond from opposite Grandcourt to Serre now lay exposed to our fire. Operations were, therefore, at once commenced under the cover of our guns to clear the remainder of the valley south of the Serre Hill, and to push our line forward to the crest of the spur.

On the night of the 3rd-4th February an important German line of defence on the southern slopes of this spur, forming part of the enemy's original second line system north of the Ancre, was captured by our troops on a front of about three-quarters of a mile. The enemy's resistance was stubborn, and hard fighting took place, which lasted throughout the whole of the following day and night. During this period a number of determined counter-attacks were beaten off by our infantry or dispersed by our artillery, and by the 5th February we had gained the whole of our objectives. In this operation, in which the excellence of our artillery co-operation was very marked, we took 176 prisoners and four machine guns.

This success brought our front forward north of the Ancre to a point level with the centre of Grandcourt, and made the enemy's hold on his position in that village and in his more western defences south of the river very precarious. It was not unexpected, therefore, when on the morning of the 6th February our patrols reported that the last remaining portion of the old German second line system south of the river, lying between Grandcourt and Stuff Redoubt, had been evacuated. The abandoned trenches were occupied by our troops the same morning.

Constant reconnaissances were sent out by us to keep touch with the enemy and to ascertain his movements and intentions. Grandcourt itself was next found to be clear of

the enemy, and by 10 a.m. on the morning of the 7th February was also in our possession. That night we carried Baillescourt Farm, about half way between Beaucourt and Miraumont, capturing 87 prisoners.

*The Advance against Serre.*

(6) The task of driving the enemy from his position in the Beaucourt Valley was resumed on the night of the 10th-11th February. Our principal attack was directed against some 1,500 yards of a strong line of trenches, the western end of which was already in our possession, lying at the southern foot of the Serre Hill. Our infantry were formed up after dark, and at 8.30 p.m. advanced under our covering artillery barrage. After considerable fighting in the centre and towards the left of our attack, the whole of the trench line which formed our objective was gained, with the exception of two strong points which held out for a few days longer. At 5 a.m. a determined counter-attack from the direction of Puisieux-au-Mont was beaten off by our artillery and machine-gun fire. Two other counter-attacks on the 11th February and a third on the 12th February were equally unsuccessful.

*The Advance towards Miraumont.*

(7) The village of Serre now formed the point of a very pronounced salient, which our further progress along the Ancre Valley would render increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for the enemy to hold. Accordingly, an operation on a somewhat larger scale than anything hitherto attempted since the new year was now undertaken. Its object was to carry our line forward along the spur which runs northwards from the main Morval-Thiepval Ridge about Courcellette, and so gain possession of the high ground at its northern extremity. The possession of this high ground, besides commanding the approaches to Pys and Miraumont from the south, would give observation over the upper valley

of the Ancre, in which many hostile batteries were situated in positions enabling their fire to be directed for the defence of the Serre sector. At the same time arrangements were made for a smaller attack on the opposite bank of the river, designed to seize a portion of the Sunken Road lying along the eastern crest of the second spur north of the Ancre, and so obtain control of the approaches to Miraumont from the west.

Our assault was delivered simultaneously on both banks of the Ancre at 5.45 a.m. on the 17th February. The night was particularly dark, and thick mist and heavy conditions of ground produced by the thaw that had just set in added to the difficulties with which our troops had to contend. The enemy was, moreover, on the alert, and commenced a heavy barrage some time before the hour of our assault, while our attacking battalions were still forming up. None the less, our troops advanced to the assault with great gallantry. On the left of our attack our artillery preparation had been assisted by observation from the positions already won on the right bank of the Ancre. In consequence, our infantry were able to make a very considerable advance, and established themselves within a few hundred yards of Petit Miraumont. The right of our attack encountered more serious resistance, but here also valuable progress was made.

North of the Ancre our troops met with complete success. The whole of the position attacked, on a front of about half-a-mile, was secured without great difficulty, and an enemy counter-attack during the morning was easily driven off.

Next day, at 11.30 a.m., the enemy delivered a second counter-attack from the north with considerable forces, estimated at two battalions, upon our new positions north of the river. His advancing waves came under the concentrated fire of our artillery and machine guns while still some distance in front of our lines, and were driven back in disorder with exceedingly heavy losses.

Eleven officers and 588 other ranks were taken prisoners by us in these operations.

*Miraumont and Serre evacuated.*

(8) The ground gained by these two attacks, and by minor operations carried out during the succeeding days, gave us the observation we desired, as well as complete command over the German artillery positions in the upper Ancre Valley and over his defences in and around Pys and Miraumont. The constant bombardment by our artillery, combined with the threat of an attack in which his troops would have been at great disadvantage, accordingly decided the enemy to abandon both villages. Our possession of Miraumont, however, gravely endangered the enemy's positions at Serre by opening up for us possibilities of a further advance northwards, while the loss of Serre would speedily render Puisieux-au-Mont and Gommecourt equally difficult of defence. There was, therefore, good ground to expect that the evacuation of Pys and Miraumont would shortly be followed by a withdrawal on a more considerable scale. This, in fact, occurred.

On the 24th February the enemy's positions before Pys, Miraumont, and Serre were found by our patrols to have been evacuated, and were occupied by our troops. Our patrols were then at once pushed forward, supported by strong infantry detachments, and by the evening of the 25th February the enemy's first system of defence from north of Gueudecourt to west of Serre, and including Luisenhof Farm, Warlencourt-Eaucourt, Pys, Miraumont, Beauregard Dovecot and Serre, had fallen into our hands. The enemy offered some opposition with machine guns at selected strong points in his line, and his artillery actively shelled the areas from which he had withdrawn; but the measures taken to deal with such tactics proved adequate, and the casualties inflicted on our troops were light.

The enemy's retirement at this juncture was greatly favoured by the weather. The prolonged period of exceptional frost, following on a wet autumn, had frozen the ground to a great depth. When the thaw commenced in the third

week of February the roads, disintegrated by the frost, broke up, the sides of trenches fell in, and the area across which our troops had fought their way forward returned to a condition of slough and quagmire even worse than that of the previous autumn. On the other hand, the condition of the roads and the surface of the ground behind the enemy steadily improved the further he withdrew from the scene of the fighting. He was also materially assisted by a succession of misty days, which greatly interfered with the work of our aeroplanes. Over such ground and in such conditions rapid pursuit was impossible. It is greatly to the credit of all ranks concerned that, in spite of all difficulties, constant touch was maintained with the enemy and that timely information was obtained of his movements.

*Le Barque and Gommecourt.*

(9) Resistance of a more serious character was encountered in a strong secondary line of defence which, from a point in the Le Transloy-Loupard line due west of the village of Beaulencourt, crossed in front of Ligny-Thilloy and Le Barque to the southern defences of Loupart Wood. Between the 25th February and the 2nd March a series of attacks were carried out against this line, and the enemy was gradually driven out of his positions. By the evening of the latter day the whole line of trenches and the villages of Le Barque, Ligny-Thilloy and Thilloy had in turn been captured. One hundred and twenty-eight prisoners and a number of trench mortars and machine guns were taken in this fighting, in the course of which the enemy made several vigorous but unsuccessful counter-attacks.

Meanwhile rapid progress had been made on the remainder of the front of our advance. On the 27th February the enemy's rearguards in Puisieux-au-Mont were driven to their last positions of defence in the neighbourhood of the church, and to the north-west of the village our front was extended to within a few hundred yards of Gommecourt. That even-

ing our patrols entered Gommecourt Village and Park, following closely upon the retreating enemy, and by 10 p.m. Gommecourt and its defences had been occupied. Next morning the capture of Puisieux-au-Mont was completed.

*Irles.*

(10) The enemy had, therefore, been driven back to the Le Transloy-Loupart line, except that he still held the village of Irles, which formed a salient to his position, and was linked up to it at Loupart Wood and Achiet-le-Petit by well-constructed and well-wired trenches.

Accordingly, our next step was to take Irles, as a preliminary to a larger undertaking against the Le Transloy-Loupart line itself; but before either operation could be attempted exceedingly heavy work had to be done in the improvement of roads and communications, and in bringing forward guns and ammunition. The following week was devoted to these very necessary tasks. Meanwhile, operations were limited to small enterprises, designed to keep in touch with the enemy and to establish forward posts which might assist in the forthcoming attack.

The assault on Irles and its defences was delivered at 5.25 a.m. on the morning of the 10th March, and was completely successful. The whole of our objectives were captured, and in the village and the surrounding works 289 prisoners were taken, together with sixteen machine guns and four trench mortars. Our casualties were very light, being considerably less than the number of our prisoners.

*The Loupart Line.*

(11) The way was now open for the main operation against the centre of the Le Transloy-Loupart line, which throughout the 11th March was heavily shelled by all natures of our artillery. So effective was this bombardment that during the night of the 12th-13th March the enemy once more aban-



doned his positions, and fell back on the parallel system of defences already referred to on the reverse side of the ridge. Grevillers and Loupart Wood were thereupon occupied by our troops, and methodical preparations were at once begun for an attack on the enemy's next line of defence.

#### THE ENEMY'S RETREAT.

##### *The General Withdrawal.*

(12) For some time prior to this date a number of indications had been observed which made it probable that the area of the German withdrawal would be yet further extended.

It had been ascertained that the enemy was preparing a new defensive system, known as the Hindenburg Line, which, branching off from his original defences near Arras, ran south-eastwards for twelve miles to Quéant, and thence passed west of Cambrai towards St. Quentin. Various "switches" branching off from this line were also under construction. The enemy's immediate concern appeared to be to escape from the salient between Arras and Le Transloy, which would become increasingly difficult and dangerous to hold as our advance on the Ancre drove ever more deeply into his defences. It was also evident, however, from the preparations he was making that he contemplated an eventual evacuation of the greater salient between Arras and the Aisne Valley, north-west of Rheims.

Constant watch had accordingly been kept along the whole front south of Arras, in order that instant information might be obtained of any such development. On the 14th March patrols found portions of the German front line empty in the neighbourhood of St. Pierre Vaast Wood. Acting on the reports of these patrols, during that night and the following day our troops occupied the whole of the enemy's trenches on the western edge of the wood. Little opposition was met, and by the 16th March we held the western half of Moislains

Wood, the whole of St. Pierre Vaast Wood with the exception of its north-eastern corner, and the enemy's front trenches as far as the northern outskirts of Sailly-Saillisel.

Meanwhile, on the evening of the 15th March, further information had been obtained which led me to believe that the enemy's forces on our front south of the Somme had been reduced, and that his line was being held by rearguard detachments supported by machine guns, whose withdrawal might also be expected at any moment. The Corps Commanders concerned were immediately directed to confirm the situation by patrols. Orders were thereafter given for a general advance, to be commenced on the morning of the 17th March along our whole front from the Roye Road to south of Arras.

#### *Bapaume and Peronne.*

(13) Except at certain selected localities, where he had left detachments of infantry and machine guns to cover his retreat, such as Chaulnes, Vaux Wood, Bapaume, and Achiet-le-Grand, the enemy offered little serious opposition to our advance on this front, and where he did so his resistance was rapidly overcome. Before nightfall on the 17th March Chaulnes and Bapaume had been captured, and advanced bodies of our troops had pushed deeply into the enemy's positions at all points from Damery to Monchy-au-Bois. On our right our Allies made rapid progress also and entered Roye.

On the 18th March and subsequent days our advance continued, in co-operation with the French. In the course of this advance the whole intricate system of German defences in this area, consisting of many miles of powerful, well-wired trenches, which had been constructed with immense labour and worked on till the last moment, were abandoned by the enemy and passed into the possession of our troops.

At 7 a.m. on the 18th March our troops entered Peronne and occupied Mont St. Quentin, north of the town. To the south our advanced troops established themselves during the

day along the western bank of the Somme from Peronne to just north of Epénancourt. By 10 p.m. on the same day Brie Bridge had been repaired by our engineers sufficiently for the passage of infantry in single file, and our troops crossed to the east bank of the river, in spite of some opposition. Further south French and British cavalry entered Nesle.

North of Peronne equal progress was made, and by the evening of the 18th March our troops had entered the German trench system known as the Beugny-Ytres Line, beyond which lay open country as far as the Hindenburg Line. On the same day the left of our advance was extended to Beaurains, which was captured after slight hostile resistance.

By the evening of the 19th March our infantry held the line of the Somme from Canizy to Peronne, and infantry outposts and cavalry patrols had crossed the river at a number of points. North of Peronne our infantry had reached the line Bussu, Barastre, Velu, St. Leger, Beaurains, with cavalry in touch with the enemy at Nurlu, Bertincourt, Noreuil, and Henin-sur-Cojeul. Next day considerable bodies of infantry and cavalry crossed to the east of the Somme, and a line of cavalry outposts with infantry in support was established from south of Germaine, where we were in touch with the French, through Hancourt and Nurlu to Bus. Further north we occupied Morchies.

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*Difficulty of Communications.*

(14) By this time our advance had reached a stage at which the increasing difficulty of maintaining our communications made it imperative to slacken the pace of our pursuit. South of Peronne, the River Somme, the bridges over which had been destroyed by the retreating enemy, presented a formidable obstacle. North of Peronne the wide belt of devastated ground over which the Somme battle had been fought offered even greater difficulties to the passage of guns and transport.

We were advancing, therefore, over country in which all

means of communication had been destroyed, against an enemy whose armies were still intact and capable of launching a vigorous offensive should a favourable opening present itself. Strong detachments of his infantry and cavalry occupied points of advantage along our line of advance, serving to keep the enemy informed of our progress and to screen his own movements. His guns, which had already been withdrawn to previously prepared positions, were available at any moment to cover and support a sudden counter-stroke, while the conditions of the country across which we were moving made the progress of our own artillery unavoidably slow. The bulk of the enemy's forces were known to be holding a very formidable defensive system, upon which he could fall back should his counter-stroke miss its aim. On the other hand, our troops as they moved forward left all prepared defences farther and farther behind them. In such circumstances the necessity for caution was obvious. At different stages of the advance successive lines of resistance were selected and put in a state of defence by the main bodies of our infantry, while cavalry and infantry outposts maintained touch with the enemy and covered the work of consolidation. Meanwhile, in spite of the enormous difficulties which the condition of ground and the ingenuity of the enemy had placed in our way, the work of repairing and constructing bridges, roads, and railways was carried forward with most commendable rapidity.

*Enemy Resistance increasing.*

(15) North of the Bapaume-Cambrai Road between Noireuil and Neuville-Vitasse our advance had already brought us to within two or three miles of the Hindenburg Line, which entered the old German front line system at Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines. The enemy's resistance now began to increase along our whole front, extending gradually southwards from the left flank of our advance where our troops had approached most nearly to his new main defensive position.

A number of local counter-attacks were delivered by the enemy at different points along our line. In particular five separate attempts were made to recover Beaumetz-lez-Cambrai, which we had captured on the 21st March, and the farm to the north of the village. All failed with considerable loss to the enemy.

Meanwhile our progress continued steadily, and minor engagements multiplied from day to day all along our front. In these we were constantly successful, and at small cost to ourselves took many prisoners and numerous machine guns and trench mortars. In every fresh position captured large numbers of German dead testified to the obstinacy of the enemy's defence and the severity of his losses.

Our cavalry took an active part in this fighting, and on the 27th March in particular carried out an exceedingly successful operation, in the course of which a squadron drove the enemy from Villers Faucon and a group of neighbouring villages, capturing 23 prisoners and four machine guns. In another series of engagements on the 1st and 2nd April, in which Savy and Selency were taken and our line advanced to within two miles of St. Quentin, we captured 91 prisoners and six German field guns. The enemy's casualties were particularly heavy.

On the 2nd April, also, an operation on a more important scale was undertaken against the enemy's positions north of the Bapaume-Cambrai Road. The enemy here occupied in considerable strength a series of villages and well-wired trenches, forming an advanced line of resistance to the Hindenburg Line. A general attack on these positions was launched in the early morning of the 2nd April on a front of over ten miles, from Doignies to Henin-sur-Cojeul, both inclusive. After fighting which lasted throughout the day the entire series of villages was captured by us, with 270 prisoners, four trench mortars, and 25 machine guns.

*The Hindenburg Line.*

(16) By this date our troops were established on the general line Selency, Jeancourt, Epehy, Ruyaulcourt, Doignies, Mercatel, Beaurains. East of Selency, and between Doignies and our old front line east of Arras, our troops were already close up to the main Hindenburg defences. Between Selency and Doignies the enemy still held positions some distance in advance of his new system. During the succeeding days our efforts were directed to driving him from these advanced positions, and to pushing our posts forward until contact had been established all along our front south of Arras with the main defences of the Hindenburg Line. Fighting of some importance again took place on the 4th and 5th April in the neighbourhood of Epehy and Havrincourt Wood, in which Ronssoy, Lempire, and Metz-en-Couture were captured by us, together with 100 prisoners, two trench mortars, and eleven machine guns.

*General Review.*

(17) Certain outstanding features of the past five months' fighting call for brief comment before I close this Report.

In spite of a season of unusual severity, a winter campaign has been conducted to a successful issue under most trying and arduous conditions. Activity on our battle-front has been maintained almost without a break from the conclusion of last year's offensive to the commencement of the present operations. The successful accomplishment of this part of our general plan has already enabled us to realize no inconsiderable instalment of the fruits of the Somme Battle, and has gone far to open the road to their full achievement. The courage and endurance of our troops has carried them triumphantly through a period of fighting of a particularly trying nature, in which they have been subjected to the maximum of personal hardship and physical strain. I cannot speak too highly of the qualities displayed by all ranks of the Army.

I desire also to place on record here my appreciation of the great skill and energy displayed by the Army Commanders under whose immediate orders the operations described above were carried out. The ability with which the troops in the Ancre area were handled by General Sir Hubert Gough, and those further south, on our front from Le Transloy to Roye, by General Sir Henry Rawlinson, was in all respects admirable.

The retreat to which the enemy was driven by our continued success reintroduced on the Western front conditions of warfare which had been absent from that theatre since the opening months of the war. After more than two years of trench warfare considerable bodies of our troops have been engaged under conditions approximating to open fighting, and cavalry has been given an opportunity to perform its special duties. Our operations south of Arras during the latter half of March are, therefore, of peculiar interest, and the results achieved by all arms have been most satisfactory. Although the deliberate nature of the enemy's withdrawal enabled him to choose his own ground for resistance, and to employ every device to inflict losses on our troops, our casualties, which had been exceedingly moderate throughout the operations on the Ancre, during the period of the retreat became exceptionally light. The prospect of a more general resumption of open fighting can be regarded with great confidence.

The systematic destruction of roads, railways, and bridges in the evacuated area made unprecedented demands upon the Royal Engineers, already heavily burdened by the work entailed by the preparations for our spring offensive. Our steady progress, in the face of the great difficulties confronting us, is the best testimony to the energy and thoroughness with which those demands were met.

The bridging of the Somme at Brie, to which reference has already been made, is an example of the nature of the obstacles with which our troops were met and of the rapidity

with which those obstacles were overcome. In this instance six gaps had to be bridged across the canal and river, some of them of considerable width and over a swift flowing stream. The work was commenced on the morning of the 18th March, and was carried out night and day in three stages. By 10 p.m. on the same day footbridges for infantry had been completed, as already stated. Medium type bridges for horse transport and cavalry were completed by 5 a.m. on the 20th March, and by 2 p.m. on the 21st March, or three and a-half days after they had been begun, heavy bridges capable of taking all forms of traffic had taken the place of the lighter type. Medium type deviation bridges were constructed as the heavy bridges were begun, so that from the time the first bridges were thrown across the river traffic was practically continuous.

Throughout the past winter the question of transport, in all its forms, has presented problems of a most serious nature, both in the battle area and behind the lines. On the rapid solution of these problems the success or failure of our operations necessarily largely depended.

At the close of the campaign of 1916 the steady growth of our Armies and the rapid expansion of our material resources had already taxed to the utmost the capacity of the roads and railways then at our disposal. Existing broad and narrow gauge railways were insufficient to deal with the increasing volume of traffic, an undue proportion of which was thrown upon the roads. As winter conditions set in these rapidly deteriorated, and the difficulties of maintenance and repair became almost overwhelming. An increase of railway facilities of every type and on a large scale was therefore imperatively and urgently necessary to relieve the roads. For this purpose rails, material, and rolling stock were required immediately in great quantities, while at a later date our wants in these respects were considerably augmented by a large programme of new construction in the area of the enemy's withdrawal.

The task of obtaining the amount of railway material



required to meet the demands of our Armies, and of carrying out the work of construction at the rate rendered necessary by our plans, in addition to providing labour and material for the necessary repair of roads, was one of the very greatest difficulty. Its successful accomplishment reflects the highest credit on the Transportation Service, of whose efficiency and energy I cannot speak too highly. I desire to acknowledge in the fullest manner the debt that is owed to all who assisted in meeting a most difficult situation, and especially to Major-General Sir Eric Geddes, Director-General of Transportation, to whose great ability, organizing power and energy the results achieved are primarily due. I am glad to take this opportunity also to acknowledge the valuable assistance given to us by the Chemin de Fer du Nord, by which the work of the Transportation Service was greatly facilitated.

I wish also to place on record here the fact that the successful solution of the problem of railway transport would have been impossible had it not been for the patriotism of the railway companies at home and in Canada. They did not hesitate to give up the locomotives and rolling stock required to meet our needs, and even to tear up track in order to provide us with the necessary rails. The thanks of the Army are due also to those who have accepted so cheerfully the inconvenience caused by the consequent diminution of the railway facilities available for civil traffic.

The various other special services, to the excellence of whose work I was glad to call attention in my last Dispatch, have continued to discharge their duties with the same energy and efficiency displayed by them during the Somme Battle, and have rendered most valuable assistance to our artillery and infantry.

I desire also to repeat the well-merited tribute paid in my last Dispatch to the different Administrative Services and Departments. The work entailed by the double task of meeting the requirements of our winter operations and pre-

paring for our next offensive was very heavy, demanding unremitting labour and the closest attention to detail.

The fighting on the Ancre and subsequent advance made large demands upon the devotion of our Medical Services. The health of the troops during the period covered by this Dispatch has been satisfactory, notwithstanding the discomfort and exposure to which they were subjected during the extreme cold of the winter, especially in the areas taken over from the enemy.

The loyal co-operation and complete mutual understanding that prevailed between our Allies and ourselves throughout the Somme Battle have been continued and strengthened by the events of the past winter, and in particular by the circumstances attending the enemy's withdrawal. During the latter part of the period under review, a very considerable tract of country has been won back to France by the combined efforts of the Allied troops. This result is regarded with lively satisfaction by all ranks of the British Armies in France. At the same time I wish to give expression to the feelings of deep sympathy and profound regret provoked among us by the sight of the destruction that war has wrought in a once fair and prosperous countryside.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

D. HAIG, Field-Marshal,  
Commanding-in-Chief  
British Armies in France.

## APPENDIX II.

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### THE BATTLE OF ARRAS.

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S FOURTH DISPATCH.—PART I.\*

WAR OFFICE,  
*7th January 1918.*

THE following Dispatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, K.T., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., Commanding-in-Chief, British Armies in France :—

GENERAL HEAD QUARTERS,  
BRITISH ARMIES IN THE FIELD,  
*25th December 1917.*

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit the following Report on the operations of the Forces under my Command from the opening of the British offensive on the 9th April 1917 to the conclusion of the Flanders offensive in November. The subsequent events of this year will form the subject of a separate Dispatch, to be rendered a little later.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

##### *The General Allied Plan.*

(1) The general plan of campaign to be pursued by the Allied Armies during 1917 was unanimously agreed on by a

\* Part II. will be an Appendix to Vol. XX., which deals with the Third Battle of Ypres.

conference of military representatives of all the Allied Powers held at French General Headquarters in November 1916.

This plan comprised a series of offensives on all fronts, so timed as to assist each other by depriving the enemy of the power of weakening any one of his fronts in order to reinforce another.

A general understanding had also been arrived at between the then French Commander-in-Chief and myself as to the *rôles* of our respective Armies in this general plan, and with the approval of His Majesty's Government preparations based upon these arrangements had at once been taken in hand.

(2) Briefly stated, my plan of action for the Armies under my command in the proposed general offensive was as follows :—

In the spring, as soon as all the Allied Armies were ready to commence operations, my first efforts were to be directed against the enemy's troops occupying the salient between the Scarpe and the Ancre, into which they had been pressed as a result of the Somme battle.

It was my intention to attack both shoulders of this salient simultaneously, the Fifth Army operating on the Ancre front while the Third Army attacked from the north-west about Arras. These converging attacks, if successful, would pinch off the whole salient, and would be likely to make the withdrawal of the enemy's troops from it a very costly manœuvre for him if it were not commenced in good time.

The front of attack on the Arras side was to include the Vimy Ridge, possession of which I considered necessary to secure the left flank of the operations on the south bank of the Scarpe. The capture of this ridge, which was to be carried out by the First Army, also offered other important advantages. It would deprive the enemy of valuable observation and give us a wide view over the plains stretching from the eastern foot of the ridge to Douai and beyond. Moreover, although it was evident that the enemy might, by a timely withdrawal, avoid a battle in the awkward salient still held

by him between the Scarpe and the Ancre, no such withdrawal from his important Vimy Ridge positions was likely. He would be almost certain to fight for this ridge, and, as my object was to deal him a blow which would force him to use up reserves, it was important that he should not evade my attack.

(3) With the forces at my disposal, even combined with what the French proposed to undertake in co-operation, I did not consider that any great strategical results were likely to be gained by following up a success on the front about Arras and to the south of it, beyond the capture of the objectives aimed at as described above. It was, therefore, my intention to transfer my main offensive to another part of my front after these objectives had been secured.

The front selected for these further operations was in Flanders. They were to be commenced as soon as possible after the Arras offensive, and continued throughout the summer, so far as the forces at my disposal would permit.

(4) The positions held by us in the Ypres salient since May 1915 were far from satisfactory. They were completely overlooked by the enemy. Their defence involved a considerable strain on the troops occupying them, and they were certain to be costly to maintain against a serious attack, in which the enemy would enjoy all the advantages in observation and in the placing of his artillery. Our positions would be much improved by the capture of the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, and of the high ground which extends thence north-eastwards for some seven miles and then trends north through Broodseinde and Passchendaele.

The operation in its first stages was a very difficult one, and in 1916 I had judged that the general situation was not yet ripe to attempt it. In the summer of 1917, however, as larger forces would be at my disposal, and as, in the Somme battle, our new Armies had proved their ability to overcome the enemy's strongest defences, and had lowered his power of resistance, I considered myself justified in undertaking it.

Various preliminary steps had already been taken, including the necessary development of railways in the area, which had been proceeding quietly from early in 1916. I therefore hoped, after completing my spring offensive further south, to be able to develop this Flanders attack without great delay, and to strike hard in the north before the enemy realized that the attack in the south would not be pressed further.

(5) Subsequently, unexpected developments in the early weeks of the year necessitated certain modifications in my plans above described.

New proposals for action were made by our French Allies which entailed a considerable extension of my defensive front, a modification of the *rôle* previously allotted to the British Armies, and an acceleration of the date of my opening attack.

As a result of these proposals I received instructions from His Majesty's Government to readjust my previous plans to meet the wishes of our Allies. Accordingly, it was arranged that I should commence the offensive early in April, on as great a scale as the extension of my front would permit, with due regard to defensive requirements on the rest of my line. The British attack, under the revised scheme, was, in the first instance, to be preparatory to a more decisive operation to be undertaken a little later by the French Armies, in the subsequent stages of which the British Forces were to co-operate to the fullest extent possible.

It was further agreed that if this combined offensive did not produce the full results hoped for within a reasonable time, the main efforts of the British Armies should then be transferred to Flanders as I had originally intended. In this case our Allies were to assist me by taking over as much as possible of the front held by my troops, and by carrying out, in combination with my Flanders attacks, such offensives on the French front as they might be able to undertake.

(6) My original plan for the preliminary operations on the Arras front fortunately fitted in well with what was required of me under the revised scheme, and the necessary prepara-

tions were already in progress. In order to give full effect, however, to the new *rôle* allotted to me in this revised scheme, preparations for the attack in Flanders had to be restricted for the time being to what could be done by such troops and other labour as could not in any case be made available on the Arras front. Moreover, the carrying out of any offensive this year on the Flanders front became contingent on the degree of success attained by the new plan.

(7) The chief events to note during the period of preparations for the spring offensive were the retirement of the enemy on the Arras-Soissons front and the revolution in Russia.

As regards the former, the redistribution of my forces necessitated by the enemy's withdrawal was easily made. The front decided on for my main attack on the Arras front lay almost altogether outside the area from which the enemy retired, and my plans and preparations on that side were not deranged thereby. His retirement, however, did enable the enemy to avoid the danger of some of his troops being cut off by the converging attacks arranged for, and to that extent reduced the results which might have been attained by my operation as originally planned. The *rôle* of the Fifth Army, too, had to be modified. Instead of attacking from the line of the Ancre simultaneously with the advance of the Third Army from the north-west, it had now to follow up the retiring enemy and establish itself afresh in front of the Hindenburg Line to which the enemy withdrew. This line had been very strongly fortified, and sited with great care and skill to deny all advantages of position to any force attempting to attack it.

The adjustments necessary, however, to enable me to carry out the more subsidiary *rôle* which had been allotted to my Armies since the formation of my original plans, were comparatively simple, and caused no delay in my preparation for the spring offensive.

My task was, in the first instance, to attract as large hostile forces as possible to my front before the French offensive

was launched, and my forces were still well placed for this purpose. The capture of such important tactical features as the Vimy Ridge and Monchy-le-Preux by the First and Third Armies, combined with pressure by the Fifth Army from the South against the front of the Hindenburg Line, could be relied on to use up many of the enemy's divisions and to compel him to reinforce largely on the threatened front.

The Russian revolution was of far more consequence in the approaching struggle. Even though the Russian Armies might still prove capable of co-operating in the later phases of the 1917 campaign, the revolution at once destroyed any prospect that may previously have existed of these Armies being able to combine with the spring offensive in the West by the earlier date which had been fixed for it in the new plans made since the conference of November 1916. Moreover, as the Italian offensive also could not be ready until some time after the date fixed by the new arrangement with the French for our combined operation, the situation became very different from that contemplated at the Conference.

It was decided, however, to proceed with the spring offensive in the West notwithstanding these serious drawbacks. Even though the prospects of any far-reaching success were reduced, it would at least tend to relieve Russia of pressure on her front while she was trying to reorganize her Government; and if she should fail to reorganize it, the Allies in the West had little, if anything, to gain by delaying their blow.

Preparations were pushed on accordingly, the most urgent initial step being the development of adequate transport facilities.

#### THE SPRING CAMPAIGN.

##### *Preparations for the Arras Offensive.*

(8) When transport requirements on the front in question were first brought under consideration, the neighbourhood was served by two single lines of railway, the combined capacity



of which was less than half our estimated requirements. Considerable constructional work, therefore, both of standard and narrow gauge railway, had to be undertaken to meet our programme. Roads also had to be improved and adapted to the circumstances for which they were required, and preparations made to carry them forward rapidly as our troops advanced.

For this latter purpose considerable use was made, both in this and in the later offensives, of plank roads. These were built chiefly of heavy beech slabs laid side by side, and were found of great utility, being capable of rapid construction over almost any nature of ground.

By these means the accumulation of the vast stocks of munitions and stores of all kinds required for our offensive, and their distribution to the troops, were made possible. The numberless other preparatory measures taken for the Somme offensive were again repeated, with such improvements and additions as previous experience dictated. Hutting and other accommodation for the troops concentrated in the area had to be provided in great quantity. An adequate water supply had to be guaranteed, necessitating the erection of numerous pumping installations, the laying of many miles of pipe lines, and the construction of reservoirs.

Very extensive mining and tunnelling operations were carried out. In particular, advantage was taken of the existence of a large system of underground quarries and cellars in Arras and its suburbs to provide safe quarters for a great number of troops. Electric light was installed in these caves and cellars, which were linked together by tunnels, and the whole connected by long subways with our trench system east of the town.

A problem peculiar to the launching of a great offensive from a town arose from the difficulty of ensuring the punctual debouching of troops and the avoidance of confusion and congestion in the streets both before the assault and during the progress of the battle. This problem was met by the most

careful and complete organization of routes, reflecting the highest credit on the staffs concerned.

*The Enemy's Defences.*

(9) Prior to our offensive, the new German lines of defence on the British front ran in a general north-westerly direction from St. Quentin to the village of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines, immediately south-east of Arras. Thence the German original trench systems continued northwards across the valley of the Scarpe River to the dominating Vimy Ridge, which, rising to a height of some 475 feet, commands a wide view to the south-east, east, and north. Thereafter the opposing lines left the high ground, and, skirting the western suburbs of Lens, stretched northwards to the Channel across a flat country of rivers, dykes, and canals, the dead level of which is broken by the line of hills stretching from Wytschaete north-eastwards to Passchendaele and Staden.

The front attacked by the Third and First Armies on the morning of the 9th April extended from just north of the village of Croisilles, south-east of Arras, to just south of Givenchy-en-Gohelle at the northern foot of Vimy Ridge, a distance of nearly fifteen miles. It included between four and five miles of the northern end of the Hindenburg Line, which had been built to meet the experience of the Somme battle.

Further north, the original German defences in this sector were arranged on the same principle as those which we had already captured further south. They comprised three separate trench systems, connected by a powerful switch line running from the Scarpe at Fampoux to Lievin, and formed a highly organized defensive belt some two to five miles in depth.

In addition, from three to six miles further east a new line of resistance was just approaching completion. This system, known as the Drocourt-Quéant Line, formed a northern

extension of the Hindenburg Line, with which it linked up at Quéant.

*Final Preparations.—Fight for Aerial Supremacy.*

(10) The great strength of these defences demanded very thorough artillery preparation, and this, in turn, could only be carried out effectively with the aid of our air services.

Our activity in the air, therefore, increased with the growing severity of our bombardment. A period of very heavy air fighting ensued, culminating in the days immediately preceding the attack in a struggle of the utmost intensity for local supremacy in the air. Losses on both sides were severe, but the offensive tactics most gallantly persisted in by our fighting aeroplanes secured our artillery machines from serious interference and enabled our guns to carry out their work effectively. At the same time bombing machines caused great damage and loss to the enemy by a constant succession of successful raids directed against his dumps, railways, aerodromes, and billets.

*The Bombardment.*

(11) Three weeks prior to the attack the systematic cutting of the enemy's wire was commenced, while our heavy artillery searched the enemy's back areas and communications. Night firing, wire-cutting, and bombardment of hostile trenches, strong points, and billets continued steadily and with increasing intensity on the whole battle front till the days immediately preceding the attack when the general bombardment was opened.

During this latter period extensive gas discharges were carried out, and many successful raids were undertaken by day and night along the whole front to be attacked.

Organized bombardments took place also on other parts of our front, particularly in the Ypres sector.

*The Troops Employed.*

(12) The main attack was entrusted to the Third and First Armies, under the command of General Sir E. H. H. Allenby, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., and General Sir H. S. Horne, K.C.B., respectively.

Four Army Corps were placed at the disposal of General Allenby, with an additional Army Corps Head Quarters to be used as occasion might demand. Cavalry also was brought up into the Third Army area, in case the development of the battle should give rise to an opportunity for the employment of mounted troops on a considerable scale.

The attack of the First Army on the Vimy Ridge was carried out by the Canadian Corps. It was further arranged that, as soon as the Vimy Ridge had been secured, the troops in line on the left of the Canadian Corps should extend the area of attack northwards as far as the left bank of the Souchez River. An additional Army Corps was also at the disposal of the First Army in reserve.

The greater part of the divisions employed in the attack were composed of troops drawn from the English counties. These, with Scottish, Canadian, and South African troops, accomplished a most striking success.

My plans provided for the co-operation of the Fourth and Fifth Armies, under the command respectively of General Sir Henry S. Rawlinson, Bart., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., and General Sir H. de la P. Gough, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., as soon as the development of my main assault should permit of their effective action.

*The Method of Attack.*

(13) The attack on the front of the Third and First Armies was planned to be carried out by a succession of comparatively short advances, the separate stages of which were arranged to correspond approximately with the enemy's successive systems of defence. As each stage was reached a short pause was to take place, to enable the troops detailed

for the attack on the next objective to form up for the assault.

Tanks, which on many occasions since their first use in September of last year had done excellent service, were attached to each Corps for the assault, and again did admirable work in co-operation with our infantry. Their assistance was particularly valuable in the capture of hostile strong points, such as Telegraph Hill and the Harp, two powerful redoubts situated to the south of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines and Railway Triangle, a stronghold formed by the junction of the Lens and Douai Lines, east of Arras.

### *The Arras Battle.*

(14) The general attack on the 9th April was launched at 5.30 a.m., under cover of a most effective artillery barrage. Closely following the tornado of our shell fire, our gallant infantry poured like a flood across the German lines, overwhelming the enemy's garrisons.

Within forty minutes of the opening of the battle practically the whole of the German front-line system on the front attacked had been stormed and taken. Only on the extreme left fierce fighting was still taking place for the possession of the enemy's trenches on the slopes of Hill 145, at the northern end of the Vimy Ridge.

At 7.30 a.m. the advance was resumed against the second objectives. Somewhat greater opposition was now encountered, and at the hour at which these objectives were timed to have been captured strong parties of the enemy were still holding out on the high ground north of Tilloy-lez-Mofflaines, known as Observation Ridge, and in Railway Triangle.

North of the Scarpe, North-country and Scottish Territorial troops, attacking east of Roclincourt, were met by heavy machine-gun fire. Their advance was delayed but not checked. On the left, the Canadians rapidly overran the German positions, and by 9.30 a.m., in spite of difficult

going over wet and sticky ground, had carried the village of Les Tilleuls and La Folie Farm.

By 12 noon men from the Eastern counties of England had captured Observation Ridge, and with the exception of Railway Triangle, the whole of our second objectives were in our possession, from south of Neuville Vitasse, stormed by London Territorials, to north of La Folie Farm. A large number of prisoners had already been taken, including practically a whole battalion of the 162nd German Regiment at the Harp.

Meanwhile our artillery had begun to move forward to positions from which they could support our attack upon our third objectives. The enemy's determined resistance at Observation Ridge, however, had delayed the advance of our batteries in this area. The bombardment of the German third line on this front had consequently to be carried out at long range, with the result that the enemy's wire was not well cut.

None the less, when the advance was resumed, shortly after mid-day, great progress was made all along the line. In the course of this attack many of the enemy's battery positions were captured, together with a large number of guns.

South of the Scarpe, Manchester and Liverpool troops took St. Martin-sur-Cojeul, and our line was carried forward between that point and Feuchy Chapel on the Arras-Cambrai Road. Here a counter-attack was repulsed at 2 p.m., and at about the same hour Scottish troops carried Railway Triangle, after a long struggle. Thereafter this division continued their advance rapidly and stormed Feuchy village, making a breach in the German third line. An attempt to widen this breach, and to advance beyond it in the direction of Monchy-le-Preux, was held up for the time by the condition of the enemy's wire.

North of the Scarpe our success was even more complete. Troops from Scotland and South Africa, who had already stormed St. Laurent Blangy, captured Athies. They then gave place, in accordance with programme, to an English division, who completed their task by the capture of Fampoux

village and Hyderabad Redoubt, breaking another wide gap in the German third-line system. The North-country troops on their left seized the strong work known as the Point du Jour, in the face of strong hostile resistance from the German switch line to the north.

Further north, the Canadian divisions, with an English brigade in the centre of their attack, completed the capture of the Vimy Ridge from Commandant's House to Hill 145, in spite of considerable opposition, especially in the neighbourhood of Thelus and the high ground north of this village. These positions were taken by 1 p.m., and early in the afternoon our final objectives in this area had been gained. Our troops then dug themselves in on the eastern side of Farbus Wood and along the steep eastern slopes of the ridge west and north-west of Farbus, sending out cavalry and infantry patrols in the direction of Willerval and along the front of their position.

The left Canadian division, meanwhile, had gradually fought their way forward on Hill 145, in the face of a very desperate resistance. The enemy defended this dominating position with great obstinacy, and his garrison, reinforced from dug-outs and underground tunnels, launched frequent counter-attacks. In view of the severity of the fighting, it was decided to postpone the attack upon the crest line until the following day.

At the end of the day, therefore, our troops were established deeply in the enemy's positions on the whole front of attack. We had gained a firm footing in the enemy's third line on both banks of the Scarpe, and had made an important breach in the enemy's last fully completed line of defence.

During the afternoon cavalry had been brought up to positions east of Arras, in readiness to be sent forward should our infantry succeed in widening this breach sufficiently for the operations of mounted troops. South of Feuchy, however, the unbroken wire of the German third line constituted a complete barrier to a cavalry attack, while the commanding

positions held by the enemy on Monchy-le-Preux Hill blocked the way of advance along the Scarpe. The main body of our mounted troops were accordingly withdrawn in the evening to positions just west of the town. Smaller bodies of cavalry were employed effectively during the afternoon on the right bank of the Scarpe to maintain touch with our troops north of the river, and captured a number of prisoners and guns.

*The Advance continued.*

(15) For some days prior to the 9th April the weather had been fine, but on the morning of that day heavy showers had fallen, and in the evening the weather definitely broke. Thereafter for many days it continued stormy, with heavy falls of snow and squalls of wind and rain. These conditions imposed great hardships on our troops and greatly hampered operations. The heavy snow, in particular, interfered with reliefs, and rendered all movements of troops and guns slow and difficult. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of the resultant delay in bringing up our guns, at a time when the enemy had not yet been able to assemble his reserves, or to calculate the influence which a further period of fine weather might have had upon the course of the battle.

North of the Scarpe little remained to be done to complete the capture of our objectives. South of the river we still required to gain the remainder of the German third line and Monchy-le-Preux. Despite the severity of the weather, our troops set themselves with the utmost gallantry to the accomplishment of these tasks.

During the night English troops made considerable progress through the gap in the German defences east of Feuchy and occupied the northern slopes of Orange Hill, south-east of the village.

Throughout the morning of the 10th April every effort was made to gain further ground through this gap, and our troops succeeded in reaching the enclosures north-west of Monchy-le-Preux.



At noon the advance became general, and the capture of the whole of the enemy's third-line system south of the Scarpe was completed. The progress of our right beyond this line was checked by machine-gun fire from the villages of Héninel, Wancourt, and Guémappe, with which our artillery were unable to deal effectively. Between the Arras-Cambrai Road and the Scarpe English and Scottish troops pushed on as far as the western edge of Monchy-le-Preux. Here our advance was held up as a result of the unavoidable weakness of our artillery support, and for the same reason an attempt to pass cavalry south and north of Monchy-le-Preux and along the left bank of the Scarpe proved impossible in the face of the enemy's machine-gun fire.

Meanwhile, on the left flank of our battle front the Canadians had renewed their attack at 4 p.m. on the portion of Hill 145 still remaining in the enemy's possession, and captured it after sharp fighting, together with over 200 prisoners and a number of trench mortars and machine guns.

### *Monchy-le-Preux.*

(16) Heavy fighting, in which cavalry again took part, continued south of the Scarpe on the 11th April. Two English infantry brigades, acting in co-operation with cavalry, attacked Monchy-le-Preux at 5 a.m., and after hard fighting, in which tanks arrived at an opportune moment, carried the position. As our men pushed through the village, the enemy was seen retreating eastwards over the open, and many casualties were inflicted on him by our machine guns. By 9 a.m. the whole of Monchy-le-Preux was in our hands, with a number of prisoners. During the afternoon and evening several determined counter-attacks were beaten off by our infantry and cavalry, assisted by the fire of our artillery.

On other parts of the front our attacks had to be made across open forward slopes, which were swept from end to end by the enemy's machine guns. The absence of adequate

artillery support again made itself felt, and little ground was gained.

In combination with this attack on the Third Army front, the Fifth Army launched an attack at 4.30 a.m. on the 11th April against the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. The Australian and West Riding battalions engaged showed great gallantry in executing a very difficult attack across a wide extent of open country. Considerable progress was made, and parties of Australian troops, preceded by tanks, penetrated the German positions as far as Riencourt-lez-Cagnicourt. The obstinacy of the enemy's resistance, however, in Héninel and Wancourt, which held up the advance of the Third Army at these points, prevented the troops of the two armies from joining hands, and the attacking troops of the Fifth Army were obliged to withdraw to their original line.

*Héninel, Wancourt, and the Souchez River.*

(17) On the 12th April the relief of a number of divisions most heavily engaged was commenced, and on the same day the cavalry were withdrawn to areas west of Arras. Great efforts were made to bring forward guns, and, in spite of the difficulties presented by weather and ground, several batteries of howitzers and heavy guns reached positions in rear of the old German third line.

On this day our attacks upon Héninel and Wancourt were renewed, and our troops succeeded in carrying both villages, as well as in completing the capture of the Hindenburg Line for some 2,000 yards south of the Cojeul River. North of the Scarpe attacks were made against Roeux village and the chemical works near Roeux station, and proved the commencement of many days of fierce and stubbornly-contested fighting.

On our left flank operations of the First Army astride the Souchez River met with complete success. Attacks were delivered simultaneously at 5 a.m. on the 12th April by

English and Canadian troops against the two small hills known as the Pimple and the Bois-en-Hache, situated on either side of the Souchez River. Both of these positions were captured, with a number of prisoners and machine guns. Steps were at once taken to consolidate our gains, and patrols were pushed forward to maintain touch with the enemy.

*Withdrawal of the Enemy.*

(18) The results of this last success at once declared themselves. Prior to its accomplishment there had been many signs that the enemy was preparing to make strong counter-attacks, from the direction of Givenchy and Hironnelle Woods, to recover the Vimy Ridge. The positions captured on the 12th April commanded both these localities, and he was therefore compelled to abandon the undertaking. His attitude in this neighbourhood forthwith ceased to be aggressive, and indications of an immediate withdrawal from the areas commanded by the Vimy Ridge multiplied rapidly.

The withdrawal commenced on the morning of the 13th April. Before noon on that day Canadian patrols had succeeded in occupying the southern portion of Givenchy-en-Gohelle, had pushed through Petit Vimy, and had reached the cross-roads 500 yards north-east of the village. That afternoon English patrols north of the Souchez River crossed No Man's Land and entered Angres, while Canadian troops completed the occupation of Givenchy-en-Gohelle and the German trench system east of it. Further south our troops seized Petit Vimy and Vimy, and Willerval and Bailleul were occupied in turn.

Our patrols, backed by supports, continued to push forward on the 14th April, keeping contact with the retreating enemy, but avoiding heavy fighting. By mid-day the general line of our advanced troops ran from a point about 1,000 yards east of Bailleul, through Mont Foret Quarries and the Farbus-Mericourt road, to the eastern end of Hironnelle Wood. North of the river we had reached Riaumont Wood and the southern

outskirts of Lievin. By the evening the whole of the town of Lievin was in our hands, and our line ran thence to our old front line north of the Double Crassier. Great quantities of ammunition of all calibres, as well as several guns, and stores and materials of every kind were abandoned by the enemy in his retreat.

Meanwhile, on the 13th and 14th April, fighting south of the Scarpe continued, and some progress was made in the face of strong hostile resistance. On the right of our attack our troops fought their way eastwards down the Hindenburg Line till they had reached a point opposite Fontaine-lez-Croisilles, about seven miles south-east of Arras. In the centre a Northumberland brigade, advancing in open order, carried the high ground east of Héninel and captured Wancourt Tower. Three counter-attacks against this position were successfully driven off, and further ground was gained on the ridge south-east of Héninel.

On other parts of our line heavy counter-attacks developed on the 14th April, the most violent of which were directed against Monchy-le-Preux. The struggle for this important position was exceedingly fierce. The enemy's attacks were supported by the full weight of his available artillery, and at one time parties of his infantry reached the eastern defences of the village. To the south and the north, however, our posts held their ground, and in the end the enemy was completely repulsed, with great loss.

#### *Results of First Attacks.*

(19) Our advance had now reached a point at which the difficulty of maintaining communications and of providing adequate artillery support for our infantry began seriously to limit our progress. Moreover, the enemy had had time to bring up reserves and to recover from the temporary disorganization caused by our first attacks. Both the increasing strength of his resistance and the weight and promptness of his counter-attacks made it evident that, except at excessive

cost, our success could not be developed further without a return to more deliberate methods.

Already a very remarkable success had been gained, whether measured by our captures in territory, prisoners, and guns, or judged by the number of German divisions attracted to the front of our attack.

At the end of six days' fighting our front had been rolled four miles farther east, and all the dominating features forming the immediate objects of my attack, which I considered it desirable to hold before transferring the bulk of my resources to the north, had passed into our possession. So far, therefore, as my own plans were concerned, it would have been possible to have stopped the Arras offensive at this point, and, while maintaining a show of activity sufficient to mislead the enemy as to my intentions, to have diverted forthwith to the northern theatre of operations the troops, labour, and material required to complete my preparations there.

At this time, however, the French offensive was on the point of being launched, and it was important that the full pressure of the British offensive should be maintained in order to assist our Allies and that we might be ready to seize any opportunity which might follow their success. Accordingly, active preparations were undertaken to renew my attack, but in view both of the weather and of the strength already developed by the enemy, it was necessary to postpone operations until my communications had been re-established and my artillery dispositions completed. The following week, therefore, saw little change in our front, though the labours of our troops continued incessantly under conditions demanding the highest qualities of courage and endurance.

So far as my object was to draw the enemy's reserves from the front of the French attack, much had already been accomplished. In addition to the capture of more than 13,000 prisoners and over 200 guns, a wide gap had been driven through the German prepared defences. The enemy

had been compelled to pour in men and guns to stop this gap, while he worked feverishly to complete the Drocourt-Quéant Line. Ten days after the opening of our offensive the number of German infantry engaged on the front of our attack had been nearly doubled, in spite of the casualties the enemy's troops had sustained. The massing of such large forces within the range of our guns, and the frequent and costly counter-attacks rendered necessary by our successes, daily added to the enemy's losses.

### *Subsidiary Operations.*

(20) In addition to the main attack east of Arras, successful minor operations were carried out on the 9th April by the Fourth and Fifth Armies, by which a number of fortified villages covering the Hindenburg Line were taken, with some hundreds of prisoners, and considerable progress was made in the direction of St. Quentin and Cambrai.

Throughout the remainder of the month the two Southern Armies maintained constant activity. By a succession of minor enterprises our line was advanced closer and closer to the Hindenburg Line, and the enemy was kept under the constant threat of more serious operations on this front.

The only offensive action taken by the enemy during this period in this area occurred on the 15th April. At 4.30 a.m. on that morning the enemy attacked our positions from Hermies to Noreuil with considerable forces, estimated at not less than sixteen battalions. Heavy fighting took place, in the course of which parties of German infantry succeeded in penetrating our lines at Lagnicourt for some distance, and at one time reached our advanced battery positions. By 1 p.m., however, the whole of our original line had been re-established, and the enemy left some seventeen hundred dead on the field, as well as 360 prisoners in our hands. During the attack our heavy batteries remained in action at very close range, and materially assisted in the enemy's repulse.

*The Attack resumed.—Guémappe and Gavrelle.*

(21) On the 16th April our Allies launched their main offensive on the Aisne, and shortly after that date the weather on the Arras front began to improve. Our preparations made more rapid progress, and plans were made to deliver our next attack on the 21st April. High winds and indifferent visibility persisted, however, and so interfered with the work of our artillery and aeroplanes that it was found necessary to postpone operations for a further two days. Meanwhile local fighting took place frequently, and our line was improved slightly at a number of points.

At 4.45 a.m. on the 23rd April British troops attacked on a front of about nine miles from Croisilles to Gavrelle. At the same hour a minor operation was undertaken by us south-west of Lens.

On the main front of attack good progress was made at first at almost all points. By 10 a.m. the remainder of the high ground west of Chérisy had been captured by the attacking English brigades, and Scottish troops had pushed through Guémappe. East of Monchy-le-Preux British battalions gained the western slopes of the rising ground known as Infantry Hill. North of the Scarpe Highland Territorials were engaged in heavy fighting on the western outskirts of Roeux Wood, and the chemical works. On their left English county troops had reached the buildings west of Roeux station and gained the line of their objectives on the western slopes of Greenland Hill, north of the railway. On the left of our main attack the Royal Naval Division had made rapid progress against Gavrelle, and the whole of the village was already in their hands.

At mid-day and during the afternoon counter-attacks in great force developed all along the line, and were repeated by the enemy with the utmost determination, regardless of the heavy losses inflicted by our fire. Many of these counter-attacks were repulsed after severe fighting, but on our right

our troops were ultimately compelled by weight of numbers to withdraw from the ridge west of Chérisy and from Guémappe. North of the Scarpe fierce fighting continued for the possession of Roeux, the chemical works, and the station to the north, but without producing any lasting change in the situation. Not less than five separate counter-attacks were made by the enemy on this day against Gavrelle, and on the 24th April he thrice repeated his attempts. All these attacks were completely crushed by our artillery barrage and machine-gun fire.

As soon as it was clear that the whole of our objectives for the 23rd April had not been gained, orders were issued to renew the advance at 6 p.m. In this attack Guémappe was retaken, but further south our troops were at once met by a counter-attack in force, and made no progress. Fighting of a more or less intermittent character continued in this area all night.

In the early morning of the 24th April the enemy's resistance weakened all along the front of our attack south of the Arras-Cambrai Road. Our troops reaped the reward of their persistence, and gained their objectives of the previous day without serious opposition.

After twenty-four hours of very fierce fighting, therefore, in which the severity of the enemy's casualties was in proportion to the strength and determination of his numerous counter-attacks, we remained in possession of the villages of Guémappe and Gavrelle, as well as of the whole of the high ground overlooking Fontaine-lez-Croisilles and Chérisy. Very appreciable progress had also been made east of Monchy-le-Preux, on the left bank of the Scarpe and on Greenland Hill.

In the minor operations south-west of Lens Cornish troops established themselves on the railway loop east of Cité des Petit Bois, and succeeded in maintaining their position in spite of numerous hostile counter-attacks.

In the course of these operations of the 23rd and 24th April we captured a further 3,000 prisoners and a few guns.



On the battlefield, which remained in our possession, great numbers of German dead testified to the costliness of the enemy's obstinate defence.

*Policy of Subsequent Operations at Arras.*

(22) The strength of the opposition encountered in the course of this attack was in itself evidence that my offensive was fulfilling the part designed for it in the Allied plans. As the result of the fighting which had already taken place, twelve German divisions had been withdrawn exhausted from the battle or were in process of relief. A month after the commencement of our offensive the number of German divisions so withdrawn had increased to twenty-three. On the other hand, the strengthening of the enemy's forces opposite my front necessarily brought about for the time being the characteristics of a wearing-out battle.

On the Aisne and in Champagne, also, the French offensive had met with very obstinate resistance. It was becoming clear that many months of heavy fighting would be necessary before the enemy's troops could be reduced to a condition which would permit of a more rapid advance. None the less, very considerable results had already been achieved, and our Allies continued their efforts against the long plateau north of the Aisne traversed by the Chemin des Dames.

In order to assist our Allies, I arranged that until their object had been attained I would continue my operations at Arras. The necessary readjustment of troops, guns, and material required to complete my preparations for my northern operations was accordingly postponed, and preparations were undertaken for a repetition of my attacks on the Arras front until such time as the results of the French offensive should have declared themselves.

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*The Final Arras Attacks.—Arleux.*

(23) The first of these attacks was delivered on the 28th April, on a front of about eight miles north of Monchy-le-Preux. With a view to economizing my troops, my objectives were shallow, and for a like reason, and also in order to give the appearance of an attack on a more imposing scale, demonstrations were continued southwards to the Arras-Cambrai Road and northwards to the Souchez River.

The assault was launched at 4.25 a.m. by British and Canadian troops, and resulted in heavy fighting, which continued throughout the greater part of the 28th and 29th April. The enemy delivered counter-attack after counter-attack with the greatest determination and most lavish expenditure of men. Our positions at Gavrelle alone were again attacked seven times with strong forces, and on each occasion the enemy was repulsed with great loss.

In spite of the enemy's desperate resistance, the village of Arleux-en-Gohelle was captured by Canadian troops, after bitter hand-to-hand fighting; and English troops made further progress in the neighbourhood of Oppy, on Greenland Hill, and between Monchy-le-Preux and the Scarpe. In addition to these advances, another 1,000 German prisoners were taken by us in the course of the two days' fighting.

*Fresnoy.*

(24) Five days later, at 3.45 a.m. on the 3rd May, another attack was undertaken by us of a similar nature to that of the 28th April, which in the character of the subsequent fighting it closely resembled.

In view of important operations which the French were to carry out on the 5th May, I arranged for a considerable extension of my active front. While the Third and First Armies attacked from Fontaine-lez-Croisilles to Fresnoy, the Fifth Army launched a second attack upon the Hindenburg

Line in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. This gave a total front of over sixteen miles.

Along practically the whole of this front our troops broke into the enemy's positions. Australian troops carried the Hindenburg Line east of Bullecourt. Eastern county battalions took Chérisy. Other English troops entered Roeux and captured the German trenches south of Fresnoy. Canadian battalions found Fresnoy full of German troops assembled for a hostile attack which was to have been delivered at a later hour. After hard fighting, in which the enemy lost heavily, the Canadians carried the village, thereby completing an unbroken series of successes.

Later in the day, strong hostile counter-attacks once more developed, accompanied by an intense bombardment with heavy guns. Fierce fighting lasted throughout the afternoon and far into the night, and our troops were obliged to withdraw from Roeux and Chérisy. They maintained their hold, however, on Fresnoy and the Hindenburg Line east of Bullecourt, as well as upon certain trench elements west of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles and south of the Scarpe.

Nine hundred and sixty-eight prisoners, including twenty-nine officers, were captured by us in these operations.

#### *Situation reviewed.*

(25) On the 5th May the French delivered their attack against the Chemin des Dames, and successfully achieved the objects they had in view. This brought to an end the first half of our general plan, and marked the close of the spring campaign on the Western front. The decisive action which it had been hoped might follow from the French offensive had not yet proved capable of realization; but the magnitude of the results actually achieved strengthened our belief in its ultimate possibility.

On the British front alone, in less than one month's fighting, we had captured over 19,500 prisoners, including over 400 officers, and had also taken 257 guns, including 98 heavy

guns, with 464 machine guns, 227 trench mortars, and immense quantities of other war material. Our line had been advanced to a greatest depth exceeding five miles on a total front of over twenty miles, representing a gain of some sixty square miles of territory. A great improvement had been effected in the general situation of our troops on the front attacked, and the capture of the Vimy Ridge had removed a constant menace to the security of our line.

I was at length able to turn my full attention and to divert the bulk of my resources to the development of my northern plan of operations. Immediate instructions were given by me to General Sir Herbert Plumer, commanding the Second Army, to be prepared to deliver an attack on the 7th June against the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, the capture of which, owing to the observation from it over our positions farther north in the Ypres salient, was an essential preliminary to the completion of the preparations for my principal offensive east and north of Ypres.

In order to assist me to concentrate troops on the new scene of operations, it was agreed that the French should take over once more a portion of the front taken over by me from them at the commencement of the year. This relief was completed without incident on the 20th May, the French extending their front to the Omignon River.

*Arras Activity maintained.*

(26) A necessary part of the preparations for the Messines attack was the maintenance of activity on the Arras front, sufficient to keep the enemy in doubt as to whether our offensive there would be proceeded with. I therefore directed the armies concerned to continue active operations with such forces as were left to them. The required effect was to be attained by a careful selection of important objectives of a limited nature, deliberate preparation of attack, concentration of artillery, and economy of infantry.

Importance was to be given to these operations by combining them with feint attacks, and by the adoption of various measures and devices to extend the apparent front of attack. These measures would seem to have had considerable success, if any weight may be attached to the enemy's reports concerning them. They involved, however, the disadvantage that I frequently found myself unable to deny German accounts of the bloody repulse of extensive British attacks which in fact never took place.

*Bullecourt and Roeux.*

(27) To secure the footing gained by the Australians in the Hindenburg Line on the 3rd May, it was advisable that Bullecourt should be captured without loss of time. During the fortnight following our attack, fighting for the possession of this village went on unceasingly; while the Australian troops in the sector of the Hindenburg Line to the east beat off counter-attack after counter-attack. The defence of this 1,000 yards of double trench line, exposed to counter-attack on every side, through two weeks of almost constant fighting, deserves to be remembered as a most gallant feat of arms.

On the morning of the 7th May English troops gained a footing in the south-east corner of Bullecourt. Thereafter gradual progress was made, in the face of the most obstinate resistance, and on the 17th May London and West Riding Territorials completed the capture of the village.

On other parts of the Arras front also heavy fighting took place, in which we both lost and gained ground.

On the 8th May the enemy regained Fresnoy village. Three days later London troops captured Cavalry Farm, while other English battalions carried Roeux Cemetery and the chemical works. Further ground was gained in this neighbourhood on the 12th May, and on the night of the 13th-14th our troops captured Roeux.

On the 20th May fighting was commenced for the sector of the Hindenburg Line lying between Bullecourt and our

front line west of Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. Steady progress was made, until by the 16th June touch had been established by us between these two points. Ten days prior to this event, on the 5th and 6th June, Scottish and North-country regiments captured the German positions on the western face of Greenland Hill and beat off two counter-attacks.

In these different minor operations over 1,500 prisoners were captured by us.

## APPENDIX III.

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### THE BATTLES OF GAZA.

SIR A. MURRAY'S DISPATCH.

WAR OFFICE,

*20th November 1917.*

THE Secretary of State for War has received the following Dispatch from General Sir Archibald Murray, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., late General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Egyptian Expeditionary Force :—

GENERAL HEAD QUARTERS,

EGYPTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE,

*28th June 1917.*

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit a report on the operations of the Force under my command from 1st March to 28th June 1917.

1. At the beginning of March the Eastern Force, under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Charles Dobell, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., was concentrated in the neighbourhood of El Arish. The head quarters of the Desert Column, under the command of Lieut.-General Sir P. Chetwode, Bt., K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., were at Sheikh Zowaiid, in advance of which place the mounted troops of the column were covering the construction of the railway, which was being rapidly extended along the coast towards Rafa. Our mounted patrols, as I reported in my last dispatch, had on 28th February entered

the village of Khan Yunus, which had been evacuated by the enemy. Every preparation was being made for an attack in force on the strong position at Weli Sheikh Nuran, upon which the Turks had been working incessantly since the beginning of January. On 5th March, however, aeroplane reconnaissance established the fact that the enemy had decided not to face our attack and was evacuating this carefully prepared position. I at once instructed the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, to do all that was possible either to prevent this evacuation or to inflict loss on the enemy during its execution, and the Royal Flying Corps were ordered to carry out bomb attacks with the utmost energy against the enemy's communications. Accordingly on 6th March and the following days vigorous attacks were made by our aircraft on the railway at Bir Saba, Tel el Sheria and the junction station on the Jerusalem-Ramleh line; but it was found impossible for our infantry or mounted troops to make any effective move against the enemy, owing to the distance between railhead and Weli Sheikh Nuran. The enemy had retired while he was still out of reach, and his troops, which then consisted of about two divisions, were subsequently distributed between Gaza and Tel el Sheria, with a small garrison at Bir Saba.

It thus became necessary to meet an altered situation, which was complicated by complete uncertainty as to the line on which the enemy would ultimately elect to stand, and also to decide on the method and direction of my advance in Palestine. I decided that it would in any case be unwise to make an attempt on Bir Saba, since by so doing I should be drawing my line of communications parallel to the enemy's front, and there was no technical advantage to be gained by linking up the military railway with the Central Palestine Railway, either at Bir Saba or Tel el Sheria. The true line of advance was still along the coast, since the enemy was no less effectually threatened thereby, while my line of communications was more easily protected and railway construction



was more rapid, owing to the absence of gradients. The coastal district, too, was better supplied with water. I decided therefore to continue for the present a methodical advance up the coast, moving troops forward as the railway could supply them, together with energetic preparation of the force for an attack in strength as soon as the state of its communications should make that possible. The most important thing was to increase the radius and mobility of the striking force. The Desert Column was therefore reconstituted to consist of the two cavalry divisions (each less one brigade)—the concentration of the Imperial Mounted Division under Major-General H. W. Hodgson, C.V.O., C.B., being completed at Sheikh Zowaiid by 16th March—and the 53rd Division, together with light armoured motor batteries. Local arrangements were also made by which improvised trains, both of horses and camels, should be available for the three infantry and two cavalry divisions in the Eastern Force.

*The Strategic Problem.*

2. By the middle of the month the railway had reached Rafa, and the work of making a large station there with the requisite sidings was being rapidly pushed on. The Desert Column was between Rafa and Sheikh Zowaiid, the 52nd Division was at Sheikh Zowaiid, and the 54th Division between that place and El Arish. There were distinct indications that the enemy intended to withdraw his troops without a fight from the Gaza-Tel el Sheria-Bir Saba line, a move which it was highly important to prevent, while it was necessary to seize the line of the Wadi Ghuzze in order to protect the advance of the railway from Rafa towards Gaza. The chief difficulty lay in deciding, in view of these considerations, the exact moment when it would be wise to abandon the methodical advance and to push out to its full radius of action a considerable force into a country bare of all supplies and almost devoid of water. I came to the conclusion that it

would be necessary to push forward the Desert Column as soon as it could be supplied from Rafa Station, and the two other infantry divisions could be maintained in support of it between Rafa and the Wadi Ghuzze. It appeared that these conditions would be fulfilled shortly before the end of the month. I therefore instructed the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, to concentrate the Desert Column about Deir el Belah, a small village to the south-west of the Wadi Ghuzze, with one of the supporting divisions on the ridge to the east of Deir el Belah and the other in the neighbourhood of Khan Yunus, with the Imperial Camel Corps to cover the right flank of the force. When these dispositions were completed the Desert Column, with the Imperial Camel Corps attached, was to march on Gaza, thus giving the enemy the alternative of standing his ground and fighting or of submitting to the attacks of our cavalry on his flanks and rear, should he attempt to retire.

*British Dispositions.*

On 20th March, General Dobell moved his head quarters to Rafa, whither, on the same day, head quarters Desert Column moved from Sheikh Zowaid. The further preliminary moves, covered by the cavalry, who on the 23rd approached very near the outskirts of Gaza, were completed without any hitch by the 25th March. By the evening of that date the whole of the Desert Column were concentrated at Deir el Belah, the 54th Division was at In Seirat under the hills to the east of Deir el Belah, the 52nd Division at Khan Yunus, and the Camel Corps and armoured batteries about Abasan el Kebir. All preliminary reconnaissances had been carried out and the orders to the General Officer Commanding, Desert Column, were to advance on Gaza in the early hours of the following morning, the cavalry pushing out to the east and north of the town to block the enemy's lines of retreat, while the 53rd Division attacked Gaza in front. The 54th Division was to

cross the Wadi Ghuzze in rear of the mounted troops of the Desert Column to a position of readiness in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Abbas, a commanding ridge 5 miles S.S.E. of Gaza, where a position was to be selected suitable for defence against an attack from east or south-east. One infantry brigade and one artillery brigade of this division were to assemble at a convenient point to the west of this position, where they would be held in readiness to reinforce the Desert Column at short notice. One brigade group of the 52nd Division was to be brought up to replace the 54th Division at In Seirat. The enemy's main body was in the Tel el Nejile-Huj area, south of the Wadi el Hesi, covered by detachments about Gaza, Sheria-Hereira and Bir Saba. His strength appeared to be between two and three divisions.

The object of this advance was threefold: firstly, to seize the line of the Wadi Ghuzze to cover the advance of the railway; secondly, at all costs to prevent the enemy from retiring without a fight; thirdly, if possible, to capture Gaza by a *coup de main* and to cut off its garrison.

On 25th March I set up my Advanced General Head Quarters at El Arish for the period of the operations, and on the following morning battle head quarters of Eastern Force were established just north of In Seirat.

### *The First Battle of Gaza.*

3. Early in the morning of 26th March the preliminary movements were begun and successfully accomplished. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division left its bivouacs at 2.30 a.m. and crossed the Wadi Ghuzze, closely followed by the Imperial Mounted Division. The leading Division headed for Beit Durdis, 5 miles east of Gaza, having completed its crossing of the Wadi by 6.15 a.m. The Imperial Mounted Division, after crossing the Wadi, headed due east for El Mendur, where it arrived at 9.30. The moves of the mounted divisions, as well as of the infantry, were considerably delayed

by a very dense fog, which came on just before dawn and did not entirely clear till 8 a.m. This unavoidable delay had a serious effect upon the subsequent operations. The Imperial Camel Corps crossed the Wadi Ghuzze a little farther south and also proceeded to El Mendur, where its rôle was to assist the Imperial Mounted Division in observing the enemy in the direction of Huj and Hereira, and to withstand any attempts to relieve Gaza from those directions. At 9.30 a.m. the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division reached Beit Durdis, and pushed out detachments to the west, north and east. In the course of these movements the 2nd Australian Light Horse closed the exit from Gaza and rested their right on the sea. A detachment of these troops captured the Commander of the 53rd Turkish Division, with his staff, while he was driving into Gaza; also a convoy of 30 Turks. Later in the morning the same force destroyed the head of a Turkish column with machine-gun fire as it debouched from Gaza in a north-easterly direction. The Imperial Mounted Division sent out patrols towards Hereira, Tel el Sheria and Huj, while two squadrons of a Yeomanry Brigade were placed astride the Bir Saba-Gaza road, about 5 miles south-east of Gaza, and one squadron was sent north to gain touch with the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division. Later in the morning these squadrons found themselves engaged with enemy mounted troops, supported by bodies of infantry, and remained so throughout the day against continuously increasing numbers. They were also exposed to the fire of heavy guns at Hereira, and suffered some casualties in consequence.

Meanwhile the 53rd Division, under the command of Major-General A. G. Dallas, C.V., C.M.G., having thrown forward strong bridgeheads before dawn, crossed the Wadi Ghuzze at a point some 3 miles from the sea coast, with one brigade on the right directed on the Mansura Ridge, and another brigade on the left directed on El Sheluf, some 2 miles south of Gaza on the ridge running south-west from that place.

A brigade was held in reserve and crossed in rear of the first-named brigade. The Gloucestershire Hussars, with a battalion and a section of 60-prs., crossed the Wadi near the sea coast, and for the remainder of the day successfully carried out their *role* of working up the sandhills to cover the left of the 53rd Division, and to keep the enemy employed between the village of Sheikh Ahmed and Gaza. At the same time the divisional squadron secured a good gun position and an excellent observation station for another section of 60-prs. on the far side of the Wadi Ghuzze, in the neighbourhood of the main road from Gaza to Khan Yunus. The 54th Division, under the command of Major-General S. W. Hare, C.B., began to cross the Wadi at 7 a.m., and two brigades proceeded to take up a defensive position on the Sheikh Abbas Ridge, south-east of Gaza. These brigades remained in their positions throughout the day without coming into action. One brigade, with a brigade of field artillery, remained in the vicinity of the Wadi, so as to be at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, when required. During the morning this brigade was ordered to Mansura, to come under the orders of General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, and it finally assembled at that point about 3.30 in the afternoon. After the preliminary reconnaissances had been completed, the 53rd Division commenced to deploy from the line El Sheluf-Mansura, to attack the Ali Muntar position, with the following objectives :—One brigade astride the El Sheluf-Ali Muntar Ridge on the enemy's south-western defences ; one brigade moving north from Mansura on the prominent Ali Muntar Ridge on the southern outskirts of the town ; and one brigade, less one battalion in divisional reserve, pivoting on the right of the last-mentioned brigade on the hill 1,200 yards north-east of Ali Muntar, in co-operation with the attack of that brigade. The deployment of the leading brigades commenced at 11.50 a.m., and the brigade in reserve moved forward shortly afterwards to its assigned position. In co-operation with artillery fire and long-range machine-gun fire, the brigade

on the left pressed forward along the ridge, and the remaining brigades over the flat, open ground, practically devoid of cover. The final advance, which began just after 1 p.m., was very steady, and all the troops behaved magnificently, though the enemy offered a very stout resistance, both with rifle and machine-gun fire, and our advancing troops, during the approach march, the deployment and attack, were subjected to a heavy shrapnel fire.

About 1 p.m., General Officer Commanding, Desert Column, decided to throw the whole of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division against the north and north-east of Gaza to assist the infantry. Both mounted divisions were placed under the orders of Major-General Sir H. G. Chauvel, K.C.M.G., C.B., General Officer Commanding, Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division, with instructions that he should bring the Imperial Mounted Division farther north to continue observing the enemy, while the Imperial Camel Corps was ordered to conform to this movement and observe the country from the right of the Imperial Mounted Division. About the same time, considerable enemy activity was observed on the roads leading north and east of Tel el Sheria and also about Hereira. By 3.30 p.m., General Chauvel had collected his division, with the exception of some detachments not yet relieved, and had commenced to move on Gaza, together with the 3rd Australian Light Horse from the Imperial Mounted Division. The attack was made with the 2nd Australian Light Horse on the right, with its right flank on the sea, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles in the centre directed on the continuation of the Ali Muntar Ridge, and the Yeomanry, less one detachment on the left, east of the town.

#### *Capture of Ali Muntar.*

4. Meanwhile, the infantry attack was being pressed with great vigour, and by 4.30 p.m. considerable progress had been made. Portions of the enemy positions were already in our

hands, and shortly afterwards the Ali Muntar Hill, a strong work known as the Labyrinth, and the ground in the immediate neighbourhood, fell into our hands. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division was already exerting pressure on the enemy, and by 5 p.m. the enemy was holding out in the trenches, and on the hill south of the Mosque only. The General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, called on the brigade of the 54th Division (Brigadier-General W. Marriott-Dodington), which had been placed at his disposal, to take this position. The brigade responded with the greatest gallantry in face of a heavy fire, and after some hard fighting it pushed home its attack with complete success, so that when darkness fell the whole of the Ali Muntar position had been carried and a footing gained on the ridge to a point about 1,200 yards north-east of that position. Meanwhile, during the relief of the observing detachments of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division by the Imperial Mounted Division, the enemy, pressing his advance vigorously from the east, had succeeded in dislodging our troops from a prominent position on the east of Gaza. To restore the situation on this flank, General Chauvel sent back the 3rd Australian Light Horse. Thanks to skilful leadership of Brigadier-General J. R. Royston, C.M.G., General Officer Commanding, and his promptness in taking up his position, the mounted troops, supported by horse artillery and motor batteries, were able to prevent any further advance by the enemy from this direction. The attack of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division on the north of Gaza was pushed home with the greatest dash and gallantry, in conjunction with the infantry attack. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles was soon in possession of the redoubt of the ridge east of Gaza, while the Yeomanry on their left carried the knoll running west from that ridge. During these operations the Somerset Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, in support of the 2nd Australian Light Horse, silenced two enemy guns, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles captured and retained, in

spite of counter-attacks, two 77-mm. guns, which they used with skill on small bodies of the enemy which were still in the occupation of houses in the vicinity. As a result, 20 prisoners were taken, and eventually the guns were safely brought away. The whole division then established itself amongst the cactus hedges on the outskirts of the town, all brigades overcoming serious difficulties in fighting their way through the cactus hedges, in spite of the stubborn resistance of the enemy. The Australian Light Horse, under the command of Brigadier-General G. de L. Ryrie, C.M.G., particularly distinguished itself in this phase of the operations.

5. When darkness fell, the situation was as follows:—Gaza was enveloped, and the enemy, in addition to heavy losses in killed and wounded, had lost 700 prisoners. The 53rd Division was occupying the Ali Muntar position, which it had captured, but its right flank was very much in the air, only a thin line of cavalry holding off the relief columns of continually increasing strength which were approaching from north and east. In support of this division, the 54th Division, less one brigade, was holding Sheikh Abbas, with its left about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the flank of the 53rd. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division was very much extended round Gaza and was engaged in street fighting. The Imperial Mounted Division and the Imperial Camel Corps, on a very wide front, were endeavouring to hold off enemy forces. The majority of the mounted troops had been unable to water their horses during the day, and it appeared that, unless Gaza was captured during the day, they would have to withdraw west of the Wadi Ghuzze in order to water their animals. Strong columns of the enemy, with guns, were moving to the relief of Gaza from the north, north-east and south-east. It was at this moment that the loss of two hours' daylight made itself particularly felt, since, had two more hours' daylight now been available, there is no doubt that the infantry would have been able to consolidate the positions they had won and for arrangements to have been made by which the 54th



Division could have effected junction with the 53rd. It is perhaps possible that if General Dobell had at this stage pushed forward his reserve (the 52nd Division) to support the 53rd the result would have been different, but the difficulty of supplying water for men and horses would have been immense and impossible to realize by those who were not on the spot. As it was, after consultation with General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, the General Officer Commanding, Desert Column, in order to prevent the envelopment of his mounted troops, decided to withdraw them during the night ; he therefore directed General Chauvel to break off the engagement and retire his divisions west of the Wadi Ghuzze, using the Imperial Camel Corps to assist in his retirement. This movement made the maintenance by the 53rd Division of the very exposed position which it had captured no longer possible, and General Officer Commanding, Desert Column, reluctantly ordered General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, to draw back his right and gain touch on that flank with the two remaining brigades of the 54th Division, which had already been ordered by General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, to fall back westwards from Sheikh Abbas and take up a line on the El Burjaliye Ridge, running south-westwards from Mansura, with their left in touch with the brigade of the 54th Division, which was to fall back from its line south of Ali Muntar and establish an outpost line farther back, with its right in touch with the remainder of its division. These movements were carried out during the night, the 53rd and 54th Divisions converging so that their inner (or northward) flanks rested one on the other, their lines running along the El Sire and El Burjaliye Ridges respectively, the Imperial Camel Corps closing the gap between the right of the 54th Division and the Wadi Ghuzze. The retirement of the mounted troops was accomplished without difficulty, though during the movement the 3rd Australian Light Horse became engaged with the enemy advancing from the direction of Huj, but succeeded in driving them off with the assistance of a

light car patrol. At dawn on the 27th, two light armoured motor batteries found themselves in the middle of a large body of the enemy, but brilliantly extricated themselves, causing considerable casualties to the enemy.

*The Second Day.*

6. The withdrawal of the cavalry and the retirement of the 53rd Division on to the El Sire Ridge enabled the enemy to reinforce the garrison of Gaza with considerable bodies of troops. At daybreak, nevertheless, reconnoitring patrols from two brigades pushed forward, seized the positions up to and including the Ali Muntar Hill which had been captured on the day before. They encountered some resistance, but drove the enemy out and established themselves on this line. At 8 a.m. the 53rd Division and the Imperial Camel Corps passed under the direct command of General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force. As soon as the advanced parties of infantry were established in the recaptured positions, preparations were made by the General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, to reinforce them; but before the reinforcements could reach their objective a strong counter-attack was made by fresh Turkish troops, which were pouring in from the north and north-east. This counter-attack drove our patrols out of the position on Ali Muntar Hill, though further advance from it on the part of the enemy was prevented by our artillery, and our infantry still held the rest of the positions. Since, however, the junction of the right of the 53rd Division and the left of the 54th made an acute salient exposed to attack on three sides, it was necessary to withdraw the line here so as to eliminate the acute angle. In addition to the Turkish reinforcements coming from the east and north-east against Ali Muntar, another body appeared early in the morning on the Sheikh Abbas Ridge, which they occupied. From this point they directed artillery fire on the rear of our positions on the Mansura Ridge, doing a certain amount of damage among

the transport animals and making any movement of camel transport during the day impossible. Our positions were also exposed to heavy artillery fire from the north. Nevertheless, though tired and ill-supplied with water, the 53rd and 54th Divisions, now placed under the command of the General Officer Commanding, 53rd Division, remained throughout the day staunch and cheerful and perfectly capable of repulsing with heavy losses to the enemy any Turkish counter-attacks. At no point was any enemy attack successful, and the Imperial Camel Corps, on the right of the 54th Division, in repulsing the attack by the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division, practically annihilated the attackers. The position, however, was an impossible one to hold permanently. It was narrow and exposed to attack and artillery fire from three directions ; also, it was devoid of water, and hostile artillery fire made the approach to it by day of slow moving camel convoys with water and supplies impossible. If it had now been practicable for the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, to advance with his three infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions, I have no doubt that Gaza could have been taken and the Turks forced to retire ; but the reorganization of the force for a deliberate attack would have taken a considerable time, the horses of the cavalry were very fatigued, and the distance of our railhead from the front line put the immediate maintenance of such a force with supplies, water and ammunition entirely out of the question. The only alternative, therefore, was to retire the infantry, and this movement, after a strong counter-attack at 4 p.m. on the northern apex of our position had been shattered by our rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire, was carried out during the night at the order of General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force. By daylight the whole force had reached the western side of the Wadi Ghuzze and taken up a strong defensive position covering Deir el Belah. The enemy made no attempt to advance on the 28th, but contented himself with the occupation of the Gaza defences, our cavalry remaining in touch with him throughout the day.

Arrangements were made on the 29th for the defensive line on the western side of the Wadi Ghuzze to be divided into sections, to be held by the 54th, 52nd and 53rd Divisions respectively, to cover the further progress of the railway which was just reaching Khan Yunus.

7. The total result of the first battle of Gaza, which gave us 950 Turkish and German prisoners and two Austrian field guns, caused the enemy losses which I estimate at 8,000 and cost us under 4,000 casualties, of which a large proportion were only slightly wounded, was that my primary and secondary objects were completely attained, but that the failure to attain the third object—the capture of Gaza—owing to the delay caused by fog on the 26th and the waterless nature of the country round Gaza, prevented a most successful operation from being a complete disaster to the enemy. The troops engaged, both cavalry, camelry and infantry, especially the 53rd Division and the brigade of the 54th, which had not been seriously in action since the evacuation of Suvla Bay at the end of 1915, fought with the utmost gallantry and endurance, and showed to the full the splendid fighting qualities which they possess.

### *The Second Battle of Gaza.*

8. Preparations were immediately begun for a second attack in greater force on the Gaza positions as soon as possible, though I instructed the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, that upon no consideration was a premature attack to be made. The station at Deir el Belah, where the head quarters of the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, had been set up on 30th March, was opened on the 5th April, and was rapidly developed into an important railhead. At this period the activity of hostile aircraft in bombing Deir el Belah and other advanced camps considerably increased, but little damage was done and all attacks were followed by vigorous retaliation on the part of the Royal Flying Corps.

The troops were all concentrated ready for an advance and reconnaissances for artillery positions east of the Wadi Ghuzze were completed early in April, but the chief factor in fixing the date of the advance was our continual source of anxiety, the water supply. It was necessary for the next advance that two divisions should be able to water in the Wadi Ghuzze, where the prospects of obtaining water by well-sinking were small. Tanks therefore had to be set up in the Wadi, and arrangements made to pump rail-borne water from Deir el Belah over the In Seirat Ridge to fill them.

The general plan of the attack had by this time already been decided. It was that the advance on Gaza with three infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions should take place in two stages. The first stage would be the occupation of the Sheikh Abbas-Mansura Ridge, south of Gaza, and its preparation as a strong point from which any flank attack could easily be repelled. A short period of development was to follow the first stage, during which water supply and communication would be improved as far as possible, heavy artillery and Tanks brought up and supplies advanced, so that the final stage—an advance on Gaza after a heavy bombardment—should be accomplished rapidly. Meanwhile, the enemy in front of me had been considerably reinforced, and had abandoned all intention of further retirement. It became clear that five divisions and a cavalry division had now appeared on our front with an increase in heavy artillery. Not only were the Gaza defences being daily strengthened and wired, but a system of enemy trenches and works was being constructed south-east from Gaza to the Atawineh Ridge, some 12,000 yards distant from the town. This put any encircling movement by our cavalry out of the question, unless the enemy's line in front of us could be pierced and a passage made through which the mounted divisions could be pushed. Until that could be done the *rôle* of our mounted troops would be to protect the right flank of the infantry, whose attack in the final stage was to be on the same lines as the first attack. While

one division advanced from the Wadi Ghuzze between the sea and the Gaza-Deir el Belah road, the two divisions occupying the Sheikh Abbas-Mansura Ridge were to attack the south-western defences up to the Ali Muntar Hill; the right division, after overcoming the enemy on its front, to pivot on its left against the defences north of Ali Muntar. The 17th April was fixed as the first stage of the advance, and on the 15th April I proceeded to Khan Yunus, where I set up my Advanced General Head Quarters.

9. For the first stage of the operations the dispositions of the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, were as follows :—The 52nd and 54th Divisions, the latter on the right, to seize and occupy the line Sheikh Abbas-Mansura-Kurd Hill (on the El Sire Ridge). The General Officer Commanding, 52nd Division, Major-General W. E. B. Smith, C.B., C.M.G., to command this attack. The 53rd Division, under the command of Major-General S. F. Mott, to remain in position just north of the Wadi Ghuzze between the sea and the Gaza-Khan Yunus road, but to carry out strong reconnaissances northward along the coast. The 74th Division to remain in general reserve in the vicinity of In Seirat. Of the Desert Column, now constituted of two mounted divisions and the Imperial Camel Corps, one mounted division was to be disposed about Shellal with the object of immobilizing enemy forces at Hereira, while the remainder of the column was to protect the right flank of the 54th Division. The enemy was disposed in a chain of detachments along the 16 miles between Sheria and Gaza, with strong trenches at El Atawineh (about 13,000 yards south-east of Gaza) and very strong defences, known as the Warren, the Labyrinth, Green Hill, Middlesex Hill, Outpost Hill and Lees Hill, running south-westwards along the ridge from Ali Muntar. This position, which commands all approaches to the town from the south-west, south and south-east, had been very strongly fortified and well wired, in addition to the natural obstacles formed by thick cactus hedges, had been made into a nest of machine guns, largely manned

by Germans. The right of his line, between Gaza and the sea, ran in the arc of a circle west and south-west of the town. This section consisted of a double line of trenches and redoubts, strongly held by infantry and machine guns well placed and concealed in impenetrable cactus hedges built on high mud banks enclosing orchards and gardens on the outskirts of the town.

The advance began at dawn on 17th April, and the Sheikh Abbas-Mansura-Kurd Hill position was taken by 7 a.m. with little opposition and practically no casualties, though one Tank was put out of action by direct hits from artillery. The consolidation of the position was at once begun under intermittent bursts of heavy shelling. The Desert Column fulfilled its task of protection and reconnaissance, during which a strong body of enemy cavalry was dislodged by a brigade of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division from a ridge just east of the Wadi Imleih. The mounted troops of the Desert Column fell back west of the Wadi Ghuzze for the night, leaving an outpost line from the right of the 54th Division southwards. Consolidation of the Sheikh Abbas-Mansura position continued during the night, and all other preparations for the second stage of the advance, which was ordered to take place on the 19th, were pushed on during the 18th. On this day the Desert Column again made strong reconnaissances towards the east. The Imperial Camel Corps was detached from the Desert Column and placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding, 54th Division.

The dispositions for the final stage, in which the guns of the French battleship *Requin* and of H.M. Monitors Nos. 21 and 31 were to co-operate, were as follows :—

The 54th and 52nd Divisions, acting under the command of General Officer Commanding, 52nd Division, were to attack the Ali Muntar group of works, the 54th pivoting on the right of the 52nd and including in its objective the group of trenches at Khirbet Sihan, east of Gaza, the Imperial Camel Corps being attached to it for this purpose. The 53rd Divi-

sion was to attack the enemy trenches in the sand-dunes south-west and west of Gaza, the line Samson Ridge-Sheikh Ajlin being its first objective.

The 74th Division, in general reserve, was to advance and take up a position of readiness behind the Sheikh Abbas and Mansura Ridges. Of the Desert Column, the Imperial Mounted Division was to make a dismounted attack on the enemy's position at El Atawineh, part of the Australian and New Zealand Mountain Division to seize a spur at Baiket el Sana on the right of the Imperial Mounted Division, and the remainder to be held in reserve to take advantage of any success gained by the Imperial Mounted Division.

The containing attack by the cavalry began at dawn, and by 10.30 a.m. the Imperial Mounted Division was on the line Gaza-Baiket el Sana Ridge, with its right refused, while the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division had seized the ridge at Baiket el Sana. The Imperial Mounted Division, under shell and machine-gun fire, continued the attack on the Atawineh trenches with the greatest gallantry, but could make little headway. For the main attack, the bombardment opened at 5.30 a.m. The guns of the *Requinn* and the monitors bombarded Ali Muntar and the works immediately to the south-west. These guns kept the enemy's defences and dug-outs under an accurate and sustained fire and were instrumental during the day in rendering several enemy counter-attacks abortive. At 7.15 a.m. the 53rd Division advanced on Samson Ridge and Sheikh Ajlin, and at 7.30 a.m. the Imperial Camel Corps, 54th Division and 52nd Division advanced to the attack. The 53rd Division, though meeting with considerable opposition, gradually worked up to Samson Ridge, which was carried by a brigade early in the afternoon. This enabled another brigade to carry the high ground between this position and the coast with little opposition, and the first objective of the division was attained. The remainder of the main attack was not so fortunate. The left brigade of the 52nd Division made good Lees Hill, the nearest point to our line of the enemy's



defences on the Ali Muntar Ridge, by 8.15 a.m., but on advancing beyond Lees Hill this brigade came under very heavy machine-gun fire from Outpost Hill, which checked its progress. This prevented any advance of the brigade, which was echeloned slightly in the right rear of the left brigade. A little later one of the Tanks came astride of the lunette on Outpost Hill, causing considerable loss to the enemy, but the infantry could not capture this lunette till shortly after 10 a.m. The Tank was unfortunately hit by three shells and burnt out. Meanwhile, the 54th Division, with the Imperial Camel Corps, had advanced steadily under fire on the right of the 52nd Division. Its left brigade was in advance of the right of the rear brigade of the 52nd Division, and thus exposed to a heavy enfilade fire from the direction of Ali Muntar. At 9.30 a.m. the left of this brigade was heavily counter-attacked, but the enemy were repulsed by machine-gun fire. On the right of this brigade another brigade fought its way forward against the enemy works between Gaza and Khirbet Sihan. One Tank advanced ahead of the infantry and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy in a redoubt, but was afterwards hit by shell fire and burnt out. The Imperial Camel Corps, in conjunction with the 4th Australian Light Horse on its right, entered the enemy trenches at Khirbet Sihan by 9 a.m., the enemy withdrawing to a position some 800 yards to the north. The Imperial Camel Corps was unable, however, to advance beyond Khirbet Sihan, and the two brigades, 54th Division, in spite of the most strenuous and gallant efforts to advance, were repeatedly checked by very heavy fire from this front. Towards noon the left of the right brigade was forced back by a determined counter-attack from the north-east, and this left the other brigade in a critical position, but it stood firm until, assisted by a third brigade of this division, the right brigade was able to regain all the ground it had lost. The enemy counter-attack against the right brigade was meanwhile continued against the 4th Australian Light Horse, which was forced to give ground, and, with the 3rd Australian Light

Horse on its right, suffered heavy casualties. However, the Imperial Camel Corps, though in a critical position, held on till a Yeomanry brigade filled the gap and stopped the enemy's advance. Heavy shelling and machine-gun fire were directed at the line during the remainder of the afternoon. Meanwhile, the left brigade, 52nd Division, was shelled out of its position on Outpost Hill, but the position was most gallantly retaken on his own initiative by Major W. T. Forrest, M.C., King's Own Scottish Borderers (subsequently killed), who collected a few men for the purpose. All further attempts by the brigade to launch an attack from Outpost Hill were shattered by fire at their inception, and the brigade in rear was forced to remain in the open under a heavy fire.

10. The position at 3 p.m. was therefore as follows :—The operations of the Desert Column (in effect a "containing attack") were meeting with all the success which had been anticipated. A serious enemy counter-attack had been checked and driven back.

The 54th Division, on the right of the main attack, had progressed, in spite of determined opposition and heavy casualties, as far as was possible until a further advance of the 52nd Division should prevent the exposure of its left flank. Reports received from the 54th Division stated that the situation was satisfactory, and that no help was required in order to enable the ground gained to be held until further progress by the 52nd Division should render practicable a renewal of the advance. I should like to state here my appreciation of the great skill with which General Hare handled his fine division throughout the day.

The 52nd Division was unable to advance beyond Outpost Hill. Middlesex Hill, and a large area of extremely broken ground west and north-west of it, had been made by the enemy exceedingly strong. The nests of machine guns in the broken ground could not be located among the narrow dongas, holes and fissures with which this locality was seamed. Partly owing to this, and partly owing to the extent of the

area, the artillery fire concentrated upon it was unable to keep down the enemy's fire when the brigade on Outpost Hill attempted to advance. The Reserve Brigade of the 52nd Division had not been employed, and the remaining brigade was in position ready to attack Green Hill and Ali Muntar as soon as the progress of the brigade on Outpost Hill on its left should enable it to do so. Up to this time, therefore, only one brigade of the 52nd Division was seriously engaged. The conformation of the ground, however, was such that the attack on Outpost and Middlesex Hills could only be made on an extremely narrow front. It is possible that if the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, had now decided to throw in his reserves, the key of the position might have been taken with the further loss of between 5,000 and 6,000 men, but this would have left my small force, already reduced, with a difficult line of front to hold against increasing reinforcements of the enemy, who, owing to the conformation of the terrain, could attack from several directions. As it was, the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, in view of information received that our attack had not yet succeeded in drawing in the enemy's reserves, decided that the moment had not yet come for an attempt to force a decision by throwing in the general reserve, though he moved a brigade of the 74th Division up to Mansura, so as to be ready to press home the attack of the 52nd Division whenever required.

At 3.30 p.m. an enemy counter-attack against the left of the right brigade, 54th Division, was shattered by our shell fire with heavy loss to the enemy, but otherwise no change occurred in the situation till 6.20 p.m., when the brigade on Outpost Hill was forced to evacuate the hill. Since it was evident that the action could not be brought to a conclusion within the day, at 4 p.m. I issued, personally, instructions to General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, that all ground gained during the day must, without fail, be held during the night with a view to resuming the attack on the Ali Muntar

position under cover of a concentrated artillery bombardment at dawn on the 20th.

The position at nightfall was that the 53rd Division held the Samson Ridge-Sheikh Ajlin line; the 52nd Division on its right was facing north towards Outpost Hill and Ali Muntar; the 54th Division carried the line south-eastwards and southwards round the Sheikh Abbas Ridge to El Meshrefe, whence the mounted troops continued the line southwards to the Wadi Ghuzze. Our total casualties had amounted to some 7,000.

*The Attack relinquished.*

During the night of the 19th-20th I received a message from General Dobell to say that, after careful deliberation and consultation with all divisional commanders, he was strongly of the opinion that the resumption of the attack ordered for the following morning did not offer sufficient prospect of success to justify the very heavy casualties which such an operation would, in his opinion, involve. He therefore urgently requested my sanction to cancel the instructions previously issued and my approval for the substitution of orders for the consolidation of the positions already gained, to be carried out on the 20th, with a view to a further attack on the enemy's line at some point between Gaza and Hereira as and when an opportunity might offer. In view of the strongly expressed opinion of the General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, supported by the General Officer Commanding, Desert Column, and the divisional commanders, I assented to this proposal.

11. The ground gained by the end of the 19th April was consolidated during the 20th. No ground, in fact, gained on that day has since been lost, and the position to which we then advanced has facilitated, and will facilitate, further operations. The enemy, contrary to my expectations, made no general counter-attack on the 20th, and all his local counter-attacks were easily repulsed. One counter-attack was nipped in the bud entirely by our aircraft; a reconnais-

sance machine having detected about 2,000 infantry and 800 cavalry gathered in the Wadi near Hereira, four machines immediately attacked this force, which they found in massed formation, with bombs, and the entire body was dispersed with heavy casualties.

On 21st April, General Dobell visited me at my Advanced General Head Quarters to discuss the situation. He repeated that, in his opinion, which was confirmed by that of all his subordinate commanders, in view of the great strength of the positions to which he was opposed, the renewal of a direct attack with the force at his disposal would not be justified by any reasonable prospect of success. He was most strongly of the opinion that deliberate methods must be adopted, and that even the assumption of trench warfare might be necessary, pending the arrival of reinforcements. After full discussion, and not without considerable reluctance, I assented to this change of policy.

In the meantime, it became apparent to me that General Dobell, who had suffered some weeks previously from a severe touch of the sun, was no longer in a fit state of health to bear the strain of further operations in the coming heat of summer. To my great regret, therefore, I felt it my duty to relieve him of his command, and to place the command of Eastern Force in the hands of Lieut.-General Sir Philip Chetwode, Bt., K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O. General Chetwode was succeeded in command of the Desert Column by Major-General Sir H. G. Chauvel, K.C.M.G., C.B.; and Major-General E. W. C. Chaytor, C.B., C.M.G., succeeded to the command of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division. Accordingly, on the morning of the 21st, I interviewed General Dobell and informed him of my decision, in which he concurred. I then interviewed General Chetwode, and instructed him to relieve General Dobell in the command of Eastern Force.

12. The enemy continued to receive reinforcements for his units and additional troops, so that early in May I estimated that he had nearly six infantry divisions in his front

line, while his total force in this theatre might amount to eight divisions. There was no doubt, moreover, that he had lately received considerable reinforcements in artillery and machine-gun units, as well as in mounted troops. Throughout the month he continued to strengthen his positions between Gaza and Hereira, and began to build a military branch line from El Tine, on the Central Palestine Railway, towards El Mejdal, north of Gaza.

As the result of recent operations I was closely in touch with the enemy on a front of some 14,000 yards from Sheikh Ajlin, on the sea, to the north-eastern corner of the Sheikh Abbas Ridge. From that point my line turned back through Sharta towards the Wadi Ghuzze, with the right flank extended to Shellal in order to protect my southern flank and to deny to the enemy the valuable supplies lying in the Wadi at that point. In the meantime, arrangements had been made to construct a branch line of railway as rapidly as possible from Rafa to the neighbourhood of Shellal.

*Raiding Operations during the Summer.*

13. From 6th May the defensive line from Sheikh Ajlin to Tel el Jemmi was reorganized into two sections, to be held on a regular system of reliefs. Cavalry patrolling was actively carried on by the mounted troops, who frequently came into contact with the enemy's mounted patrols to the east and north-east. During the earlier part of May, the enemy aircraft made several attacks with bombs on Deir el Belah and other points near the front line. The Royal Flying Corps made effective retaliation against Ramleh and Sheria, and as the month advanced the enemy's activity diminished in this respect. During May, also, our heavy batteries, with the co-operation of the Royal Flying Corps, made very effective practice on enemy batteries in the neighbourhood of Gaza. The only event, however, of any note during this month was a cavalry raid carried out on the 23rd and 24th May against

the Bir Saba-Auja Railway, with the object of preventing the enemy from recovering and using its material for the construction of his branch line from El Tine to Mejdel.

The plans for this operation necessitated the movement of one mounted brigade and demolition parties to Bir el Esani, 10 miles W.S.W. of Bir Saba on the Wadi Shanag, during the afternoon before the raid took place. Since this movement could not be concealed, it was arranged that an artillery demonstration should take place on the left flank in order to draw the enemy's attention from the movement on Esani, and place him in doubt as to our intentions. For three days previously the artillery carried out wire-cutting on the Gaza defences, and the enemy's repairing parties were kept under artillery and machine-gun fire. The artillery demonstration was made more intense during the afternoon of 22nd and the early morning of 23rd May. This demonstration was very successful in making the enemy apprehensive on his right, and he appears to have suffered a considerable number of casualties.

On the afternoon of the 22nd, one brigade of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division with demolition parties from the field squadrons of both mounted divisions moved to Esani. During the night of the 22nd-23rd this force marched on the railway at Asluj and Hadaj by way of Khalasa. Khalasa was surrounded during the night and no opposition was met with there. The demolition parties reached their positions on the railway line just before 7 a.m. on the 23rd. The Imperial Camel Corps left Rafa early on the 22nd and marched approximately down the Turco-Egyptian frontier on Auja. Owing to the difficulties of the country the Imperial Camel Corps demolition party was unable to begin work on the railway before 11.45 a.m. on the 23rd. The demolition parties had previously been thoroughly trained, and their work, once begun, was carried out with great rapidity. Those of the mounted divisions completed the destruction of the railway from Asluj to Hadaj—about 7 miles—by 10 a.m. The destruction of this portion of the line made interference with

the work of the Imperial Camel Corps practically impossible. The demolition party of that corps, therefore, had time to complete the destruction of six miles of railway eastward from Auja during the day.

Thus 13 miles of railway line were completely destroyed, each pair of rails being cut in the centre. One 6-span bridge near Hasaniya, one 12-span bridge over the Wadi el Abiad, a viaduct over the Wadi Theigat el Amiria, and (between Thamiliat el Rashid and Asluj) one 18-arched bridge, one 5-arched bridge, one 3-arched bridge, one 2-arched bridge and two culverts were completely destroyed. All the points and switches at Asluj Railway Station were destroyed. A considerable number of telegraph posts were cut down, wires cut and insulators broken. A quantity of decauville material near Hadaaj was destroyed. Finally, a large stone building near Wadi Inkharuba was demolished, with quantities of sandbags, timber and matting.

While this work was in progress, the mounted divisions of the Desert Column carried out a demonstration towards Bir Saba and Irgeig. The divisions marched by night on the 22nd-23rd, and during the 23rd carried out a tactical and water reconnaissance of the area immediately west and north-west of Bir Saba. A Heavy Battery, R.G.A., was moved forward behind this force and shelled the viaduct at Irgeig.

The withdrawal of the mounted troops was effected without difficulty, the enemy showing no signs of activity. The Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division met a few Arab snipers. One armed Arab was killed and 13 prisoners were taken. The Imperial Mounted Division encountered only slight opposition from small parties of enemy cavalry. Our casualties were one man wounded. During this operation crops which could not be brought in and which would otherwise fall into the hands of the enemy were destroyed by our troops. It is estimated that 120 tons were burnt during the day. One of our aeroplanes employed for inter-communication between Desert Column Head Quarters and the Imperial



Camel Corps was damaged in attempting to land near Auja. The Imperial Camel Corps therefore remained at that place for the night 23rd-24th, and personnel of the corps succeeded in repairing the aeroplane, the loss of which was thereby avoided, and which returned safely to the aerodrome on the 24th.

For the month of June there is nothing of special note to record, the period being mainly one of energetic preparation for further operations. For the time being, the infantry in the northern part of the line were confined to trench warfare, to which the troops soon adapted themselves, while to the south and south-east our cavalry patrols were daily in touch with the enemy.

14. During the period covered by this report, the situation on the Western front has been such as to call for little comment. The light armoured motor batteries, light car patrols, and Bikanir Camel Corps have been able to keep the whole front free from disturbance. The route from Sollum to Siwa has now been improved, so that Siwa can be reached by car from Sollum in a single day.

No incident has occurred in the Southern Canal Section. The extent of the Northern Canal Section increased continuously as the Eastern Force advanced, and at the beginning of May this command was reorganised as that of the General Officer Commanding, Palestine Lines of Communication Defences. This command now extends from the northern part of the Suez Canal to Khan Yunus, and includes the responsibility for the defence of almost the whole length of the military railway and pipe-lines. Except for attacks by hostile aircraft, no enemy attempts have been made against the lines of communication, but between 7th and 11th May a small force from this command, consisting of two companies Imperial Camel Corps and a field troop, made a successful expedition to El Auja, Birein and Kossaima, for the purpose of blowing up the wells and water supply at those places to the utmost possible extent. The force met with no opposition, captured

five prisoners and completed successfully the demolitions, including that of the railway bridge north-east of El Auja.

I have great pleasure in recording the addition to the force under my command of a French detachment under M. le Colonel Piépape and of an Italian detachment under Major da Agostino. At the end of May I was most happy to welcome in Egypt M. le Général Bailloud, who came as inspector of French troops in Northern Africa to inspect the French detachment.

At the beginning of May it became necessary to reorganise the administrative services on the Eastern Lines of Communication, owing to the increasing size of the Eastern Force. An inspector, Palestine Lines of Communication, was therefore appointed. His head quarters were established at Kantara on 2nd May, and the advantage of this appointment has been proved by the increased efficiency of the lines of communication services east of the Canal.

### *Summary of Results.*

15. In conclusion, I should like to place on record my appreciation of the magnificent work done by all the fighting troops before Gaza. No praise can be too high for the gallantry and steadfastness of the cavalry, infantry, artillery, Royal Flying Corps and all other units which took part in the two battles. Particular commendation is due to the infantry. The 52nd, 53rd and 54th Divisions, though actively engaged for over a year in the Sinai Peninsula, had not, since their reorganisation after the operations in the Dardanelles, been able to show how they had improved out of all knowledge in training and discipline and in all that goes to make up an excellent fighting organisation. Under severe trial they have now given ample proof of the finest soldierly qualities. It is hardly necessary to reiterate the praises of the Australian and New Zealand mounted troops, who have always come up to their high reputation, and their comrades in the mounted

yeomanry have shown themselves to be endowed with the same bravery, vigour and tenacity. The Imperial Camel Corps, manned by Australian, New Zealand and British personnel, has proved a *corps d'élite*, possessed with a quite remarkable spirit of gallantry. The distinguished service rendered by the troops from India is deserving of high commendation. Units of the Indian Regular Army, mounted and dismounted Imperial Service troops and the Bikanir Camel Corps have shown soldierly qualities in action, discipline and endurance; and I wish to record the unfailing devotion to duty of the battalions in garrison in Egypt and to the British West Indies Regiment. The Camel Transport Corps and the Egyptian Labour Corps—two units raised in this country—are worthy of the warmest praise for their untiring labours, under the severest conditions, in close conjunction with the fighting troops.

#### *The Different Services.*

The health of the troops has throughout been singularly good. All branches of the medical services, under Surgeon-General J. Maher, C.B., deserve the highest commendation for their successful work at the front, on the lines of communication and in the base hospitals. The presence in the force of a number of civil medical consultants, who have so patriotically given their services, has been of the very greatest value, and they have worked in successful accord with the regular medical services of the army. The Australian Army Medical Corps and the New Zealand Medical Corps have also been remarkable for their efficiency and unremitting devotion.

The workings of the supply and transport services have had to take into account quite abnormal conditions, both of supplies available and terrain, involving in some cases complete reorganisation of units to suit local conditions. In spite of this, the functions of these services have been discharged in a most admirable manner, and great credit is due to the

Director, Brigadier-General G. F. Davies, C.M.G., and to all ranks under him.

The same local conditions above referred to have rendered the force more than usually dependent on animal transport, while operations have involved the use of important mounted forces. The remount and veterinary services have consequently held a vital place in the organisation, and they have carried out their respective tasks to my complete satisfaction.

I have, in a previous dispatch, brought to notice the admirable work of the Signal services, and I need only now add that this service has continued in its efficient and highly satisfactory condition. The work done by the engineer services and the works directorate deserves high commendation.

There is, perhaps, no department which has a greater influence upon the *morale* of an Army than that of the Chaplains' Department. The thorough and self-sacrificing manner in which Chaplains of all denominations, under the principal chaplain, Brigadier-General A. V. C. Hordern, C.M.G., have carried out their duties, has earned the gratitude of all ranks.

The impossibility of granting leave home on any extended scale has rendered the Army in the Field dependent on rest camps and voluntary institutions for that rest and relaxation so necessary in view of the arduous conditions of campaigning in the desert and in tropical heat. I wish to take this my last opportunity of expressing the thanks of the whole Field Force to those ladies and gentlemen who have done so much to obviate the deprivations imposed on it by those conditions. Especially are they due to the Church Army and the Young Men's Christian Association, whose recreation huts are provided, not only in the rest camps, but also throughout the front. It would be hard to exaggerate the value of these institutions, both in sustaining the *morale* and the health of the troops.

The dealing with reinforcements and material arriving from England, the transference of such large numbers of

troops to other theatres of war, the keeping of records thus affected and the registration of casualties and evacuation of sick and wounded, have thrown very heavy work on the base ports. The staffs responsible for these matters have discharged their arduous duties with marked efficiency, frequently under difficult climatic conditions and abnormal pressure.

In spite of the important operations in progress during this time, military training has been continued with undiminished vigour. The Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun has by now passed over 22,000 officers and non-commissioned officers through its hands.

A staff school was started early in the year for the training of junior staff officers. Three courses, each of about six weeks, were held at this school for which accommodation was found just outside Cairo, the number of candidates at the first two courses being shared between this force and the Salonika Force, while the last course was confined to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. The results of these courses have been exceedingly useful, and the instruction has been extremely well carried out.

His Highness the Sultan has, throughout the period of my command, given me valuable encouragement and wise counsel, based on his unrivalled knowledge of Eastern affairs.

I wish once more to thank His Excellency the High Commissioner, General Sir F. R. Wingate, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., for the ready assistance and quick sympathy which he has given me in all my work ; all branches of the Civil Government of Egypt have assisted the Forces in the Field with unfailing readiness.

My gratitude is also due to Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, K.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., Commander-in-Chief, East Indies and Egypt, for his part in securing the unfailing co-operation of the Royal Navy at all times ; and I wish to make special reference to the admirable and gallant work done by the Naval Air Service, which has been of the greatest assistance to my operations.

My Chief of the General Staff, Major-General Sir Arthur Lynden Lynden-Bell, K.C.M.G., C.B., has given me unvarying and loyal support at all times. He has proved himself an ideal Chief of the General Staff, combining a thorough knowledge of his duties with an activity and an energy that overcome all difficulties. He has earned the confidence of all ranks.

Major-General John Adye, C.B., has been an excellent Deputy Adjutant-General, having great knowledge of all administrative work and sound judgment. He has been of the greatest assistance to me.

Major-General Sir Walter Campbell, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., my Deputy-Quartermaster-General, is an organiser of great general ability, very sound and hardworking. I owe a great debt of gratitude to this officer.

The General Officer Commanding, Eastern Force, Lieut.-General Sir P. W. Chetwode, Bt., K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., has united the qualities of brilliant leadership and sure judgment and has invariably inspired confidence in all ranks.

The labours of a Commander-in-Chief in the Field are considerably lightened when the complex and difficult duties which fall to the military secretary are ably discharged. In this respect I have been fortunate. Lieut.-Colonel Sir H. Pollen, C.M.G., is an officer of outstanding ability and sound judgment, and the manner in which he has carried out his duties has greatly contributed to the smooth working of the staff, and is beyond praise.

I am submitting, in a further dispatch, the names of officers, non-commissioned officers and men and others whom I wish to bring to notice for gallant and distinguished service during the period under review.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,

A. J. MURRAY, General,

Commanding-in-Chief,

Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

## APPENDIX IV.

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### THE YEAR AT SALONIKA.

#### GENERAL MILNE'S DISPATCH.

WAR OFFICE,  
*14th November 1917.*

THE Secretary of State for War has received the following dispatch from Lieutenant-General G. F. Milne, C.B., D.S.O., Commanding-in-Chief, British Salonika Force :—

GENERAL HEAD QUARTERS,  
BRITISH SALONIKA FORCE,  
*1st October 1917.*

MY LORD,

I have the honour to submit the following Report on the operations of the British Forces in Macedonia from 9th October 1916 to the present date.

Since the 29th November 1916, when, in accordance with General Sarraill's request, I took over the sector then held by the Italian troops, the army under my command has occupied the front covering Salonika from the east and north, and extending from the mouth of the River Struma along the Tahinos-Butkova-Doiran lakes to the River Vardar, a distance of approximately ninety miles. In addition, from the commencement of December until the end of February one infantry brigade was detached to the neighbourhood of Katerini on the western shores of the Gulf of Salonika.

The necessity of holding this long line placed a considerable

strain on the endurance of the troops, especially during the winter months, when, owing to the unprecedented rainfall, the mountain roads became almost impassable and rendered the question of supply one of considerable difficulty, a difficulty overcome only by the energy and determination of all concerned. In spite of the fact that the whole of this force has been in the line without relief for over a year, with only occasional limited opportunities for training and without the encouraging effects of offensive action, a very high standard of morale and efficiency has been maintained.

*The Campaign up to the End of 1916.*

At the commencement of the period under review, the rôle allotted to the British troops had for its object the engaging of the enemy along the front during the operations which culminated in the capture of Monastir on the 19th November. From that date onwards the advent of the winter season, accompanied as it was by heavy falls of snow and rain, made operations, except on a small scale, a matter of considerable difficulty owing to the paucity of metalled roads and the heavy nature of the soil in the valleys.

In the Struma River valley, since the conclusion of the operations reported in my last dispatch, the front line had been gradually pushed forward across the river so as to include the localities of Ago Mah, Homondos, Kalendra Woods, Cuculuk, and Elisan on the left bank. The mounted troops, supported by armoured cars and contact aeroplanes, pushed their reconnaissances between Seres and Lake Tahinos, and in places even succeeded in crossing the Demirhissar-Seres-Drama railway.

Meanwhile the enemy had been actively employed behind their advanced positions in preparing a defensive line along the foothills on the opposite side of the valley, and had occupied the large village of Barakli Dzuma and a line of trenches across the low ground from Savjak to Butkova Lake.



In order to carry out my instructions and at the same time to strengthen the left flank of the troops in the valley, I decided towards the end of October to capture Barakli Dzuma and to advance the whole line. As a preliminary measure the villages of Elisan-Kavdarmah-Ormanli-Haznatar were occupied in order to form a strong bridgehead within which bridges were thrown over the river, then considerably swollen by heavy rain. In carrying out this duty under difficult circumstances the Royal Engineers gained great credit for their skill and rapidity in construction.

The attack itself, admirably conceived and skilfully executed by the troops, was carried out after a short bombardment on the morning of the 31st October, and was a complete success. In conjunction with other operations in the valley, some 350 prisoners were taken.

Under cover of patrol encounters a defensive line was constructed from Jenimah via Osman Kamila-Homondos-Jenikoj-Nevoljen-Cuculuk-Elisan-Barakli Dzuma-Haznatar to Alipsa on the Struma, and remained as such during the winter months.

At the commencement of December the Greek regiment which had co-operated in the valley during October and November was withdrawn and transferred to another section of the Allied line. I much regret the severance of the cordial relations which had been established with these gallant troops.

On the Doiran-Vardar front the command was faced with an entirely different situation, and minor operations undertaken with a view to continually harassing an enemy, strongly entrenched in mountainous and rocky country, and to inflicting as much loss as possible, both in material and in personnel, had of necessity to be restricted to continual patrol encounters, raids and artillery bombardments. The most successful of these raids were carried out by battalions of the Welsh and Cheshire Regiments on separate occasions towards the end of October, when, after a heavy bombard-

ment, the enemy's trenches were attacked with great determination and gallantry and severe casualties inflicted.

During the month of November and the early part of December these harassing tactics were continued along both fronts, resulting, in the Struma Valley, in the occupation of the villages of Kumli, Barakli and Prosenik, where the Royal Dublin Fusiliers captured practically the whole garrison, and an advance against the enemy's positions in the vicinity of Tumbitza Farm. Owing to the decision to withdraw to another area the Greek troops co-operating with us, I decided to discontinue the last-mentioned operation.

The winter season had now fully set in, and the frequent rains had rendered the Struma Valley wet and heavy. Problems of transport and communications became more difficult, and the main Seres road was kept open only with the greatest difficulty. In the valley itself horse transport had to be abandoned north of Orljak, and recourse had to light railways, while the sudden rises of the river rendered communication precarious, and necessitated considerable work in the construction of heavy bridges.

On the left bank of the Vardar considerable damage was inflicted on the enemy by a successful attack on the night 26th-27th November against a portion of the ridge called "Crete des Tentes," lying to the north-east of Macukovo. In spite of climatic difficulties, similar operations with varying success were conducted during the ensuing months, resulting in continual loss to the enemy in killed and prisoners.

### *The Spring Offensive.*

During the early months of this year raiding tactics were further developed, and were carried out with an increasing degree of success. Battalions of the Suffolk Regiment, the Northumberland Fusiliers, the Welsh Fusiliers, and the Devonshire Regiment showed conspicuous skill and gallantry, the last mentioned during a very successful raid on the Petit

Couronné Hill, south of Doiran, inflicting severe loss on the enemy, who counter-attacked in force. By this means the co-operation of the artillery and engineers with the infantry was constantly practised and a high standard of offensive spirit maintained in the Army.

Towards the end of February I received instructions from the allied Commander-in-Chief to be prepared to commence offensive operations during the first week of April. The rôle allotted to the force under my command was to engage the enemy on the Struma front and to the east of Lake Doiran while making an attack in force west of that lake. The time at my disposal was short, more especially as the unusual inclemency of the weather had reduced the Seres Road to such a state of mud as to render motor transport practically impossible beyond Likovan, and thus tended to delay the early commencement of operations in the Struma Valley; but the sudden and unexpected change from intense wet and cold to unusual heat, which took place towards the end of March, considerably facilitated preparations. By the 10th of March the corps on the left had pushed forward for a distance of 1,000 yards on a front of 3,500 yards, extending in a south-westerly direction from Horseshoe Hill, on the ridge which forms the watershed between the Doiran Lake and the Vardar Valley. This ridge, commonly called the "P" ridge, running north into the left centre of the enemy's position, rises to a height of about 500 feet above Horseshoe Hill, and dominates the whole country between Doiran Lake and the Vardar. On both flanks in front of Doiran, and opposite Macukovo, the Bulgarian trenches are pushed forward, forming strong bastions, with flanks resting on Doiran Lake and the Vardar River respectively. These fortifications, which were laid out when the Bulgarian army first arrived on the Greek frontier, are skilfully planned and well executed, the trenches themselves being cut out of solid rock.

Situated some 800 yards in front of the Horseshoe Hill, which formed the apex of the salient between these two

bastions, and about 11,000 yards north-east of Krastali village, a hostile advanced work called "P. 4½" formed a valuable observation station to the enemy, and its capture was essential to any further advance. The front, therefore, selected for the initial attack, with a view to threatening the approaches to Doiran town, extended from the western shore of Doiran Lake, along the enemy's salient in front of the town, to the crest of the "P" ridge.

*The Attack of 24th April.*

Preparations for the offensive were completed by 8th April, but for various reasons the Commander-in-Chief found it necessary to postpone operations until 24th April, when the attack was launched after a bombardment of the hostile positions extending over several days, which elicited the fact that the strength of the opposing heavy artillery had been considerably increased during the interval.

The assaulting infantry succeeded in entering the hostile trenches along the whole front attacked, meeting everywhere with very severe opposition. On the right, owing to the very heavy artillery and trench mortar fire encountered, more especially in the Jumeaux ravine, a deep and difficult obstacle with steep sides which separated the opposing lines, only the leading troops were able to gain a footing, and reinforcements found the greatest difficulty in advancing to their support. During the night, several determined hostile counter-attacks were repulsed with heavy loss, but eventually, after several hours' hard fighting, the attackers were forced back to their own trenches. This operation was carried out with the greatest gallantry and determination by representative battalions of English county regiments, among whom the Devonshire Regiment and the Berkshire Regiment deserve special credit for their dash and tenacity.

On the left all objectives were gained, and the enemy's front trenches occupied on a front of nearly a mile from Hill

" 380," five hundred yards north of the ruins of Doldzelli village, to the enemy's work of Hill " P. 4½." During the following days the captured position was consolidated in spite of repeated counter-attacks, during which battalions of the Manchester Regiment and the Shropshire Light Infantry inflicted severe loss on the enemy, who fought with great determination.

Preparations had been commenced with a view to taking advantage of the commanding position gained on the ridge by advancing our line on its western slopes, when information was received that, owing to climatic and other reasons, it had been found necessary again to postpone the Allied operations on the right bank of the Vardar River and in the vicinity of Monastir. Finally, I received instructions that the 8th May had been selected as the date for the re-commencement of the Allied advance, on which date the army under my command should again concentrate its main effort in the vicinity of Doiran.

#### *The Attack of 8th May.*

On this occasion it was decided to restrict the attack on the salient to the section lying between the lake and the " Petit Couronné " Hill. After a preliminary bombardment the leading troops advanced, and succeeded in reaching the enemy's trenches under very heavy artillery fire. A battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in the centre, advancing in a most spirited manner, had not only commenced consolidation of the position gained, but had pushed forward to Red Scar Hill on their immediate front, when, owing to counter-attacks both in front and in flank, they were compelled after severe hand-to-hand fighting, in which all ranks greatly distinguished themselves, to relinquish their position. Meanwhile, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, supported by the Berkshire Regiment, assaulted the eastern end of the " Petit Couronné " Hill, and, though met by heavy artillery and trench mortar fire, repeatedly returned

to the attack with great determination. After defeating several counter-attacks, they succeeded in establishing themselves on the slopes of the hill, which they held till about mid-day of the 9th, when it was found impossible to maintain the positions gained. The dash and gallantry exhibited by all ranks of these two battalions is worthy of high praise.

On the western slopes of the Horseshoe Hill Ridge the attack succeeded in advancing to a depth of 500 yards on a front of two miles, and in seizing and occupying an important under-feature, termed Goldie's Hill, 2,000 yards south of Devedzili. The positions gained, after being further increased on the 15th, and again on the 20th, were consolidated in spite of the enemy's repeated endeavours to recapture them, and now form the main line of defence, which runs along the ridge of hills from just south of Krastali village to Sejdelli village.

Meanwhile, operations on the Struma front had been held in abeyance pending the development of events in the west, but, on the 15th May, the village of Kjudri was seized and held, and a series of intermediate trenches between Ernekoj and the River Struma were captured, about 100 prisoners being taken. A further advance was in progress when, on the 24th inst., definite instructions were received from General Sarraill that offensive operations were to cease all along the front.

#### *Situation during the Summer of 1917.*

As summer was commencing, I now had to consider the best means of maintaining the health and efficiency of the Army during a period when malaria and dysentery are more or less prevalent in the low-lying areas. In view of the experience gained last year, and in spite of the fact that a considerable amount of anti-malarial work had been carried out in the valleys during the winter, I decided to abandon the forward positions on the right and centre of the line, and to

retire to the foothills on the right bank of the Struma River, and to the south of the Butkova Valley. All bridgeheads were garrisoned and arrangements made for the vacated area to be daily patrolled, an arduous duty, for the successful carrying out of which during the whole summer the Derbyshire and Surrey Yeomanry deserve the highest commendation. By the 14th June the withdrawal had been carried out without incident or interference by the enemy.

In accordance with my instruction, two detachments were dispatched during the month of June to co-operate with the French in the occupation of old Greece. One detachment was placed under the orders of General Regnault at the Piræus and in Corinth. The second, under those of General Venel, in Thessaly. These detachments returned in the course of the next six weeks.

In spite of the intense heat experienced during July and August, during which latter month the mean temperature was 5 deg. in excess of that of last year, minor encounters with the enemy have been of almost daily occurrence, among the most successful being a raid on the village of Homondos by battalions of the Royal Scots and the Scottish Horse, when 35 prisoners were taken and two guns destroyed. Another small raid by the Lancashire Fusiliers, when the number of enemy killed was nearly double the strength of the raiding party, forms a good example of the spirit which permeates all ranks. In all operations which have taken place the co-operation of the Royal Artillery and Field Companies, Royal Engineers, has been of a high standard.

During the past year the Royal Flying Corps has rendered very efficient service. Towards the end of February the hostile aircraft were reinforced by a powerful bombing squadron, and it is due to the unaided efforts of the Royal Flying Corps that but little damage was caused in the British area. Towards the end of April, the Vice-Admiral Commanding Eastern Mediterranean Squadron kindly placed at my disposal bombing and fighting machines of the Royal Naval Air Service,

by whose welcome assistance complete mastery of the air was obtained during the May operations. During the summer months almost daily bombing attacks have been made on the various hostile railheads and encampments, and in the numerous air combats which have taken place our pilots have shown marked gallantry and skill.

*Tributes to the Various Services.*

I am greatly indebted to the Army Signal Service for the efficient manner in which their work has been carried out over such a large extent of country.

The maintenance of communications has been one of my most difficult tasks. To appreciate fully the work done under this heading it is necessary to realise what facilities existed in the winter of 1915-1916, and compare them with those that now obtain. In 1915, apart from two partially-metalled roads, one to Monastir and one to Seres—both of which were in a deplorable condition—no roadway possible for mechanical transport existed. Now these two roads have, by constant work, been improved out of all knowledge, widened and drained; cross-roads have been cut through the hills; new roads in base and forward areas constructed and old roads re-made; while the construction of a further main route from Salonika to Kukus, and thence to the fronts on either side of Lake Doiran, has rendered dependence on the Doiran railway no longer essential. Moreover, the winter of 1916-1917 was exceptionally wet, and the difficulty of road maintenance correspondingly increased, the absorbent nature of the soil in many parts of the Seres road especially causing portions of the roadway to disappear after prolonged spells of snow and rain. Determined efforts on the part of the Royal Engineers and of the infantry working with them, however, successfully prevented interruptions of any length in the supply machinery.

The expansion of hospitals, erection of hutments, im-



provements in landing facilities, provision of water supply, etc., have thrown heavy work on the Engineer services at the base, but satisfactory results have been achieved. The railway directorate has been fully occupied with the construction of new standard gauge as well as Decauville lines, with the improvement and maintenance of existing tracks and in the formation of railheads. The dock system, too, has been supplemented, and rapidity of transit largely increased.

Recently, further transit facilities at this port have been acquired, consequently the speed of off-loading ships has been quickened up, and the military landing staff under the Base Commandant have turned to the best advantage all the resources now at their disposal. The system adopted for the clearance of docks and quays works well and smoothly.

To the Principal Naval Transport Officer—Commodore F. Travers, R.N.—and to his assistants, my thanks are due for their unfailing co-operation in all matters relating to embarkation and disembarkation.

During the past year the supply of the troops has proceeded satisfactorily, in spite of the attendant difficulties. During the worst of the winter the work devolving on the drivers of the mechanical transport was arduous and trying, but all ranks displayed the greatest zeal and cheerfulness in the performance of their duties.

It is satisfactory to be able to record that the wastage amongst the animals of this force, in spite of the heavy strain during the winter, has been exceptionally low. The supply of all material to the troops necessitates the use of both wheeled and pack transport, while the tracks branching outwards from the main routes, although in dry weather providing a good running surface, are, in the majority of cases, deep in mud after prolonged snow or rain. The calls on horse flesh have hence been severe, and it speaks well for the Army Veterinary Services that the mortality and loss through wastage has been kept to such a low figure.

Valuable work has, too, been performed by the Remount

Department, and the institution of convalescent depots for debilitated animals has proved a success.

The Ordnance Services, under Brigadier-General Sir C. M. Mathew, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., whose departure I much regret, have been most ably conducted, and skill and forethought have been shown in the establishment of workshops for the manufacture of articles ordinarily sent from overseas.

The Army Postal Department has continued its unostentatious methods of collection and delivery of postal matter, and is deserving of high praise for the successful manner in which it has overcome all obstacles.

The work of the Army Pay Department has been most satisfactorily performed.

Financial transactions in this area are at times somewhat complicated, and my thanks are due to the Financial Adviser—Colonel A. B. Beavis—for his able assistance in all details connected with finance.

The Allied organisations referred to in my dispatch of the 8th October 1916—viz., the Customs Control and the Claims Compensation Commissions—have performed most useful work. The machinery adopted has been thoroughly tested, and has proved reliable and efficient.

A word of praise is due to the Officer Commanding and Staff of the Expeditionary Force Canteen. Every effort to meet the requirements of the troops has been made, and energy has been displayed in the management and conduct of this institution.

The health of the troops has been on the whole satisfactory. With the advent of the cold weather malaria abated rapidly, and the sick rate remained low during the winter. Preparations for the next summer in the form of anti-malarial work were, however, steadily pursued, drainage of swamps and canalisation of streams were extended, and the personnel for technical work strengthened; but what proved of almost greater importance was the instruction of all ranks in the value of field sanitation and the prevention of disease in the field.

The results have been most satisfactory, and, while giving full credit to the various ranks of the medical services and to the devoted band of nursing-sisters, I consider that the great diminution in disease in this Army, as compared with last summer, is due chiefly to the fact that the value of preventive measures is fully realised by all ranks, and that the whole Army has profited by the experience of last year.

The arrangements for retaining all sick and wounded in this theatre have worked most satisfactorily, and the decision has, in my opinion, much to recommend it. The arrival of sufficient transport and the opening up of new roads has permitted the establishment in the hills of hospitals and convalescent camps, where, under trained instructors, convalescents are put through a graduated course of physical drill before returning to the depots.

As regards the general work of the Royal Army Medical Corps and the assistance afforded by the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John, I can only reiterate the remarks contained in my last dispatch.

I desire to take this opportunity of placing on record my appreciation of the very high state of discipline and efficiency maintained by all ranks of this Army under what are, at times, trying and arduous conditions, always borne with loyalty and cheerfulness.

My thanks are due to Vice-Admiral Sir Cecil Thursby, K.C.M.G., and to the officers and men of the Royal Navy and R.N.A.S. under his orders, for their close co-operation and ready assistance at all times, more especially on the occasion of the landing of troops at Katerini under difficulties, and during operations in the vicinity of the mouth of the Struma River.

Finally, I desire to bring to your Lordship's notice the good services rendered during the past eighteen months by my two former staff officers, Major-General W. Gillman, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., and Major-General Travers Clarke, C.B., the latter of whom had been with this force since it first landed,

and both of whom have lately been transferred to other theatres of war, and by Surgeon-General Sir H. R. Whitehead, K.C.B., whose tactful administration has been fully appreciated by our Allies, and with whom I part with much regret.

I propose to submit, in due course, a list of the names of those officers, non-commissioned officers and men whose distinguished and gallant services I consider specially deserving of mention and reward.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

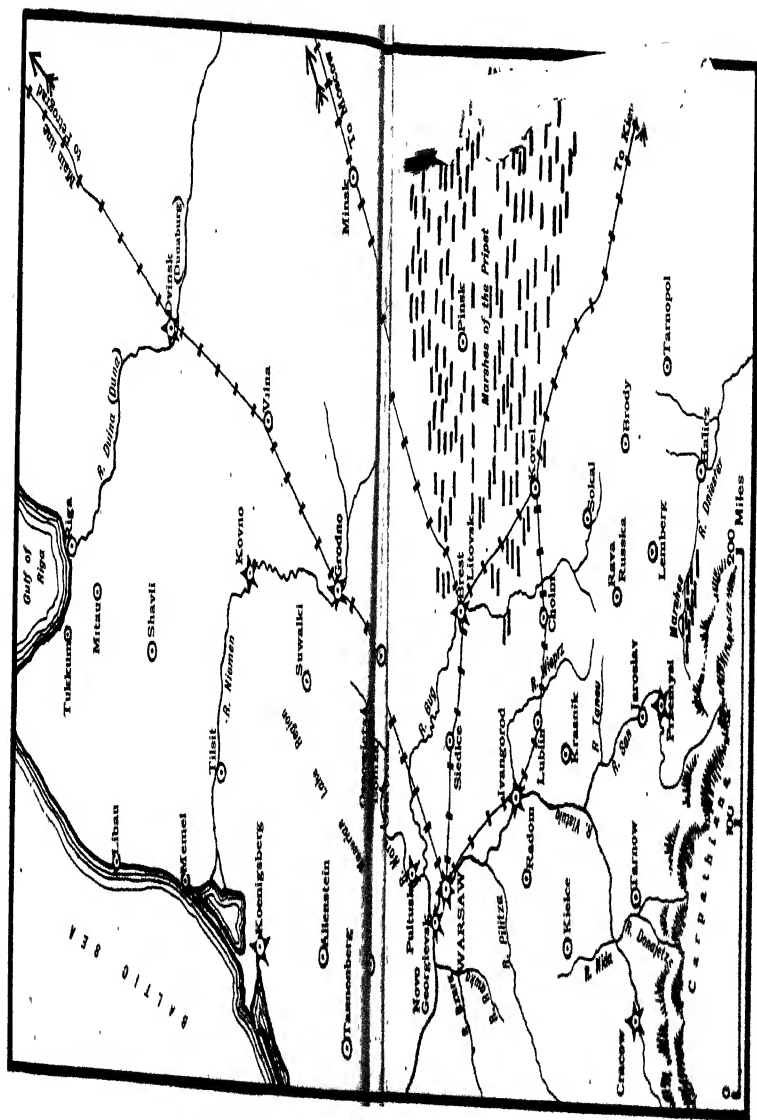
Your Lordship's obedient servant,

G. F. MILNE,

Lieutenant-General, Commanding-in-  
Chief, British Salonika Force.







2. The Eastern Theatre of War.  
 Note. Only the chief railways connecting from the eastward on Warsaw are shown.







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